

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY

Patterson Lakes Primary School

PURPOSE

To ensure that parent payment practices are consistent, transparent and ensure that all children have access to the standard curriculum.

RATIONALE

The Victorian community shares a vision to build an education system that champions excellence and ensures that every child and young person has access to the opportunities to succeed in life, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Schools are best placed to make local decisions which ensure that all students can access a broad range of learning opportunities that support their expectations and promote their aspirations as they move through the education system. Parent contribution, in all forms, assists schools to provide an enriched learning and teaching program for every student and is highly valued by school communities.

Learning and teaching programs vary across schools based on local needs and circumstances and reflect each school's priorities, decisions and resources. This, in turn, informs the parent payment charges approved by school councils that may vary from one school to the next.

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS CHARGE FOR?

The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 provides for instruction in the standard curriculum program to be free to all students in government schools. School councils are responsible for developing and approving school-level parent payment charges and can request payments from parents¹ under three categories only- Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions.

Essential Student Learning Items are those items, activities or services that are essential to support student learning of the standard curriculum. These are items that the school considers essential for all students and which students take possession of. Parents may choose to provide the items themselves or buy the items from the school where practical and appropriate.

Optional Items are those items, activities or services that are offered in addition to or support instruction in the standard curriculum program. These are provided on a user-pays basis so that if parents choose to access them for students, they are required to pay for them.

Voluntary Financial Contributions

¹ Parent' in the policy has the same meaning as in the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, which is: 'parent', in relation to a child, includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for the child including parental responsibility under the *Family Law Act 1975* of the Commonwealth and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

Parents can be invited to make a donation to the school for a general or specific purpose, e.g. school grounds projects, library fund or for new equipment. Only some Voluntary Financial Contributions are tax-deductible.

The attached diagram "**Understanding Parent Payment Categories**" provides examples of items and materials under each category.

In implementing this policy, schools must adhere to the following principles:

PRINCIPLES

- **Educational value:** Student learning, aspirations and wellbeing are paramount when schools determine their parent payments practices
- **Access, equity and inclusion:** All students have access to the standard curriculum program and participation of all students to the full school program is facilitated
- **Affordability:** Cost to parents is kept to a minimum and is affordable for most families at the school
- **Engagement and Support:** Early identification and engagement strategies by the school ensure parents are well informed of the payment options and supports available for those experiencing hardship
- **Respect and Confidentiality:** Parents and students experiencing hardship are treated with respect, dignity, sensitivity and without judgement and the identity and personal information of all parents and students are kept confidential in respect to parent payments
- **Transparency and Accountability:** School parent payment practices are well communicated, clear and transparent and their impact on student programs and families are reviewed by school councils

COST AND SUPPORT TO PARENTS

When school councils consider the proposed requests for parent payments the cost is kept to a minimum and is affordable to most parents at the school.

School principals must ensure that:

- items students consume or take possession of are accurately costed
- payment requests are broadly itemised within the appropriate category
- parents are advised that they have the option of purchasing equivalent Essential Student Learning Items themselves, in consultation with the school
- information on payment options is available, accessible and easily understood to all parents so that they know what to expect and what supports they can access
- parents are provided with early notice of annual payment requests for school fees (i.e. a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous school year). This enables parents to save and budget accordingly.
- parents are provided with reasonable notice of any other payment requests that arise during the school year- ensuring parents have a clear understanding of the full financial contribution being sought
- the status and details of any financial arrangements are kept confidential and only shared with relevant school personnel
- parents experiencing hardship are not pursued for outstanding school fees from one year to the next
- use of debt collectors to obtain outstanding school funds owed to the school from parents is not permitted

- there will be only one reminder notice to parents for voluntary financial contributions per year
- Invoices/statements for unpaid essential or optional items accepted by parents are not generated more than monthly or according to the parent payment arrangement with the school.

SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

Families may experience financial difficulties and may be unable to meet the full or part payments requested. Principals and school councils exercise sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of students and their families when considering parent payment fees. There are a range of support options available to support and assist parents. These can be accessed through [“Cost support for families.”](#)

Consideration to hardship arrangements in respect to payment requests is provided to families experiencing long term hardship or short term crisis on a confidential, case by case basis. All schools have written hardship arrangements that include a proactive approach to providing support for parents experiencing financial difficulty.

All parents are provided the name and contact details of a nominated parent payment contact person at the school who they can discuss payment arrangements with.

ENGAGING WITH PARENTS

In respect to each school’s development of its parent payments, school councils will engage in effective communication with the school community and have strategies in place to ensure they are aware of and understand the needs and views of parents.

REVIEW OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Schools will monitor the effectiveness and impact of the implementation of this policy at least annually as part of its ongoing improvement and report back to the school community.

The full Parent Payment Policy is available from the Department’s [School Policy and Advisory Guide](#).

Answers to the most commonly asked questions about school costs for parents see:

[Frequently Asked Questions – For Parents](#)

Understanding Parent Payment Categories

Schools

What does the legislation say?

The Education and Training Reform Act (2006) provides for free instruction in the standard curriculum program to all students in government schools. The Act also empowers school councils to charge fees to parents for goods and services provided by the school to a child.

In the Act, a 'Parent' includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for a child including parental responsibility under the Commonwealth Family Law Act 1975 and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

What do schools pay for as part of 'free instruction'?



Free instruction is the teaching staff, administration and the provision of facilities in connection with the instruction of the standard curriculum program, including reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities.

The standard curriculum for Years F-10 means implementation of the Victorian Curriculum F-10.

The standard curriculum for senior secondary schools means a program that enables a student to be awarded a VCE or VCAL qualification.

What principles govern parent payment practice?

Educational Value | Access, Equity & Inclusion | Affordability
Engagement & Support | Respect & Confidentiality | Transparency & Accountability

Parents

What may parents be asked to pay for?

Schools can request payment for Essential Student Learning Items



These are items, activities or services that the school deems **essential** to student learning of the standard curriculum.

Where practical and appropriate, parents may choose to purchase items through the school or provide their own.

These may also be either:

Items the student takes temporary or permanent possession of

- e.g.
- textbooks, activity books, exercise books
 - stationery, book bags
 - student ID cards, locks
 - cooking ingredients students will consume
 - materials for final products that students take home (technology projects, build-your-own kits, dioramas)
 - Picture Exchange Communication Systems

Activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend

i.e. travel, entry fees or accommodation

- e.g.
- excursions
 - incursions
 - school sports
 - work placements

Parents can be asked to pay for items, activities and services in the three Parent Payment Categories:

Essential Student Learning Items,
Optional Items and
Voluntary Financial Contributions.

Schools determine how items, activities and services are classified within these categories based on the learning and teaching program of their school.

Schools can request payment for Optional Items

These are items, activities or services that are **optional** and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum.

Students may access these on a user-pays basis.

These may be either:

Items the student purchases or hires

- e.g.
- school magazines, class photos
 - functions, formals, graduation dinners
 - materials for extra curricular programs
 - student accident insurance

Activities the student purchases

- e.g.
- fees for extra curricular programs or activities, such as instrumental music tuition
 - fees for guest speakers
 - camps, excursions, incursions, sports
 - entry fees for school run performances

Items and/or materials that are more expensive than required to meet the standard curriculum

- e.g.
- use of silver in metal work instead of copper
 - supplementary exam revision guides

Support for families experiencing hardship is available at every school and each school has a parent payment contact person. See your school's policy for more information.

For more information on Parent Payments and Personal Devices, visit the DET website at: www.education.vic.gov.au

Schools can invite **Voluntary Financial Contributions** for



- e.g.
- Building or Library fund (Tax deductible)
 - Voluntary contributions for a specific purpose, such as equipment, materials, services.
 - General voluntary contributions



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Parent Payment Policy

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

- All parent payment payments will be defined as one of the three payment categories;
 - Essential
 - Optional
 - Voluntary
- **2018 charges to parents:**

| Year Level | Essential Education Fees | Optional Fees (Camps, excursions & activities) |
|------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Foundation | \$152.00 | \$110.50 |
| Year 1 | \$168.00 | \$90.00 |
| Year 2 | \$149.00 | \$113.00 |
| Year 3 | \$148.00 | \$291.00 |
| Year 4 | \$121.00 | \$413.50 |
| Year 5 | \$136.00 | \$394.00 |
| Year 6 | \$144.00 | \$629.00 |

- Requests for payments will be by statement; reminders will be sent a maximum of monthly.
- Optional charges are strictly on user pay basis. When parents sign permission for their child to attend an **optional activity** they are consenting to pay the associated costs.
- When parent payments are in arrears students will be restricted from attending optional activities until an arrangement for payment has been reached between the parent and the school.
- Refunds for camps, excursions and activities will only be issued upon receipt of medical certificate and must be approved by the school Principal. In certain situations, refunds may only be in part; as the school may have incurred a cost in booking a place for the student. Any other refund request for extenuating circumstances must be approved by the school Principal. When a student has elected to attend an optional activity and then chooses to 'opt out', a refund will, only, be issued where a minimum of two weeks prior written notice is received by the school. When transferring from the school any unused portion of fees paid will be refunded and any CSEF funds held will be transferred to the new school.
- Prompt parent payments at the commencement of the school year, reduces administration time for teachers, allowing for a greater amount of time spent enriching student learning programs.

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS.

- A statement detailing all School Council approved charges for the next school year sent home to families in December.
- The preferred method of payment is B-Pay. A unique B-Pay reference number is detailed on each family statement.
- Families will have the following payment options:
 - **Pay in full by the second week of Term 1.**
 - **Pay in three instalments, due: (must complete an instalment plan form)**
 - Term 1 (end of week2)
 - Term 2 (end of week2)
 - Term 3 (end of week2)
- Families on an instalment plan, who fall into arrears, must pay for **optional** camps, excursions or activities two weeks prior to the event, in order for their child to participate.
- When an instalment is made the application of the instalment will be in the order as follows:
 - Essential Educational Items (supplied to students on the first day of Term 1)
 - Camps, Excursions & Activities
 - Other

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

- CSEF- eligible families are encouraged to apply for the (CSEF) Camps Sports and Excursions. An application for CSEF was sent home to families along with the notification of Fees and Charges. Additional application forms and support may be sought from the school office.
- Second hand uniforms are available to parents through the FFFA (Family, Friends & Fundraising Association) second hand uniform stock is donated to the school and a sales day is held each Term.
- State School Relief- The donation/supply of new school uniforms to families in need. The school office will support families to apply for uniforms from State School Relief.
- The school will direct families in need of support:
 - Crisis services : <http://cris.crisisservices.org.au/>
 - The Smith family: www.thesmithfamily.com.au
 - Brotherhood of St Laurence savers Program www.bsl.org.au
 - Anglicare: www.anglicare.org.au

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

- Monique Hunt (Office Manager) is the nominated parent payment contact person, who parents can communicate with by phone, email or in person about their financial situation and related difficulties in making payments.
- Parents experiencing financial hardship will be given the range of referrals to community support as directed by the Department of Education.
- The school will make every effort to communicate with parents disconnected from the school, who may be experiencing hardship. The school will engage discreet strategies of handling such situations on a case-by-case basis.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

- *This policy will be communicated to families as follows:*
 - *The Parent Payment Policy is placed as a prominent link on the schools official website.*
 - *The Parent Payment Policy is sent home to families in hard copy (annually).*
 - *Flexibuzz notification with link to Parent Payment Policy on website (annually).*
- *Parents are notified six weeks prior to the end of the school year of the preceding years' known charges for booklist items, camps, excursions and activities.*
- *General enquiries regarding parent payments are to be directed to the school office.*
- *Parents may raise further issues, concerns or complaints regarding the parent payments or the Parent Payment Policy to the School Principal, Assistant Principal, Business Manager or to the School Council.*
- *Parents that may be experiencing financial hardship should contact the parent payment contact person, Monique Hunt; parents can communicate with Monique by phone, email or in person about their financial situation and related difficulties in making payments.*
- *Every effort has been made to keep parent payments to a minimum whilst supporting the school curriculum and the values of Patterson Lakes Primary School.*
- *All school fees are set and ratified by the Patterson Lakes Primary School Council.*
- *Although parents have the option of purchasing equivalent materials from other sources, a portion of essential education items have been purchased on behalf of parents, some of the items are specific by nature and as such, may be difficult for parents to source. If a parent does wish to choose to provide equivalent materials, this should be done in consultation with the school, and should meet the specifications provided by the school. Some items, for example Athletics License, Music Books, school specific diary, may only be provided by the school.*

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

The Patterson Lakes Primary School Council is responsible to monitor, the implementation, the transparency of processes and engagement with parents in relation to the Parent Payment Policy. The Patterson Lakes Primary School Council is responsible for how and when this policy will be reported back to the school community, and the timing and processes of review of the policy.

Date of approval by School Council

13.12.2017