



## PARENT PAYMENTS (DET Overview)

### **Policy & Guidance**

- All students in Victorian government schools must have free access to instruction that is offered by a school to fulfil the curriculum requirements in the eight key learning areas of the Victorian Curriculum F-10, the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).
- School Councils can only request payments from parents/carers under three categories: Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Contributions.
- Schools must consider the [Financial Help for Families Policy](#) and make arrangements for families who are experiencing financial hardship and unable to make payments.
- Schools must have their parent payment arrangements approved by their School Council and uploaded onto their public websites.
- Schools cannot:
  - deny students access to the standard curriculum program, refuse instruction or disadvantage students on the basis of payments not being made for education items or activities
  - request payments from parents for school operating costs (for example, utility costs) or general and unspecified charges (for example, subject levies)
- Schools and School Councils must adhere to the Parent Payments Policy which is outlined as follows.

### **Free instruction**

All students in Victorian government schools must have free access to instruction that is offered by a school to fulfil the standard curriculum requirements in the eight key learning areas:

- English
- Mathematics
- Sciences (including physics, chemistry and biology)
- Humanities and social sciences (including history, geography, economics, business, civics and citizenship)
- The arts
- Languages
- Health and physical education
- Information and communication technology and design and technology.

Free instruction includes 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.

Schools cannot deny students access to the standard curriculum program, refuse instruction or disadvantage students on the basis of payments not being made for education items or activities. Schools cannot withhold student access to enrolment or advancement to the next year level as a condition of payments being made.

### **Parent payment categories**

School Councils can only request payments from parents under three categories:

#### **1. Essential Student Learning Items**

Essential Student Learning Items are items and activities which the school deems as essential for student learning, without which, students would be unable to access the school's delivery of the standard curriculum.

Where practical and appropriate, parents/carers may choose to purchase essential items through the school or provide their own. Where a child cannot provide an essential student learning item or

participate in an essential activity, the school must make alternative arrangements e.g. make the item available through the school or provide alternative financial support options.

Essential Student Learning Items do not include:

- school operating costs (refer to School operating costs in the [Guidance](#) tab at the website below)
- generic subject levies or fees
- non-curriculum related costs
- unspecified charges

Schools must be able to justify why an item or activity has been categorised as an Essential Student Learning Item.

## **2. Optional Items**

Optional Items are items and activities that enhance or broaden the schooling experience of students and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum. Students access these on a user pays basis.

Optional Items include non-curriculum-based school events, optional excursions and camps, optional sporting or music programs and materials that don't relate to the standard curriculum such as school magazines.

## **3. Voluntary Contributions**

School Councils can invite parents to make a voluntary contribution to support the school. Voluntary Contributions can be for general or clearly explained specific purposes that relate to the School Council's functions and objectives. Where a Voluntary Contribution is requested for a specific purpose, the funds may only be used for that purpose.

There are no obligations on parents/carers to make any Voluntary Contributions and schools cannot refuse students instruction in the standard curriculum if their parents do not contribute.

## **Financial help for families**

Schools have a commitment and responsibility to be responsive to parents/carers who may be experiencing either short-term or long-term financial hardship.

Schools must:

- ensure costs to parents/carers are kept to a minimum and made affordable for families
- consider the Financial Help for Families Policy and make arrangements for families who are experiencing financial hardship and unable to make payments for their child
- nominate a parent payment contact person(s) to support families with parent payment arrangements

Refer to [Financial Help for Families](#) for further information.

## **School's parent payment arrangements**

Schools do not need to develop their own school-level parent payment policy. However, schools should develop their own parent payment arrangements that suit their local context. Parent payment arrangements include the school's:

- payment requests to parents for items and activities. Items and activities must be clearly specified, accurately costed and itemised using the 3 categories
- financial support options for parents experiencing financial hardship
- payment methods

Schools must:

- have their parent payment arrangements approved by their school Council prior to communicating it to parents
- upload their parent payment arrangements onto their school website for transparency (refer to Uploading parent payment arrangements onto the school website in the [Guidance](#) tab)

Schools must use the [Parent Payment Arrangements Template](#) to develop arrangements and communicate these to parents/carers.

### Purpose

- This policy outlines the ways in which the Altona North Primary School Council can request payments or voluntary contributions from parents/carers and ensures that parent payment practices in schools are consistent, transparent and that all children have access to the standard curriculum.

### Definition

#### **Standard curriculum**

Standard curriculum is the Victorian Curriculum F-10, Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).

### Implementation

- **The school will use the mandatory [Parent Payment Policy and Implementation Template](#) when developing the school's parent payment arrangements.** This will ensure the school can customise the implementation of the policy to the local context whilst retaining all information in the policy template, thereby facilitating consistent implementation of key practices across schools.

### Finance

#### Finance manual

School budgeting and reporting for parent/carer payments and contributions will follow the procedures outlined in the [Finance Manual – Financial Management for Schools](#) and [Parent Payments Policy](#). These include, but are not limited to:

School Councils must approve, in a timely manner, parent payment arrangements

- any payment must be accurately recorded in CASES21
- receipts must be issued immediately to parents upon payment
- records of payments and contributions must be kept confidential

#### School operating costs

The school will not request payments from parents/carers for school operating costs. This includes:

- teacher support or professional learning
- utilities such as electricity and internet
- school equipment (for example, sports equipment for physical education)
- administrative costs such as merchant fees associated with electronic payment transactions, sending text messages or letters to parents, administration software, photocopying and insurance or equipment maintenance

#### Outstanding payments

If necessary, the school will issue reminder notices to families for unpaid Essential Student Learning Items and Optional Items, but no more than once per term.

The school will not penalise students if payments for Essential Student Learning Items or Optional Items are outstanding, including:

- denying students access to the standard curriculum
- harassing or coercing parents to make payments
- carrying over debts for purchased items and completed activities to the following school year unless otherwise agreed
- charging penalty fees
- using a debt collector to recover outstanding payments
- denying students access to Optional Items if payment has not been received for Essential Student

#### Learning Items

The school will consider assistance to families experiencing financial hardship on a confidential and case by case basis. We also will exercise discretion prior to generating reminder notices for unpaid items for families experiencing hardship. Refer to [Financial Help for Families](#) for further information regarding schools assisting parents experiencing financial hardship.

### Refunds

Refunds will be worked out on a case by case basis at the local school level and the school will use discretion to provide refunds to families and will do so where it is reasonable and fair (for example, if the school has not incurred a cost).

If the school has incurred costs, we will act reasonably and take into consideration the *Financial Help for Families Policy* and relevant arrangements, including support for families experiencing hardship. For example, the school may consider refunding families for unavoidable event cancellations if a family experiences a crisis or sudden serious illness and the student can no longer attend the event.

If the school decides to provide a refund, then parents/carers need to agree and advise the school where the refund should be paid. If that agreement cannot be reached, the refund is usually paid into the account from which the money came. Where the payment was made in cash, the school will wait until the parents/carers reach an agreement and advise the school.

### Seeking payment for damage to or loss of school property

The school has the discretion to request that parents/carers contribute to the cost of damaged or lost items owned by the school if their child was responsible for damaging or losing the item.

The school will continue to facilitate student access to the standard curriculum regardless of whether payment for damage to or loss of items are made. Before requesting payment for damaged or lost goods, we will consider factors including financial hardship.

If a student damages school infrastructure or buildings (for example, windows), the school will not seek payments for damages, however, we may invite all parents/carers to make a general or specific (for example, building fund if applicable) voluntary contribution towards repair.

### Voluntary Contributions

Voluntary Contributions to the school are only tax deductible if they are:

- donations which have been endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office and have a Deductible Gift Recipients status
- donations to special schools with a Deductible Gift Recipients status

Refer to the [Finance Manual for Schools](#) for further information on this.

### Communications and school arrangements

#### Communications to parents

Communications to parents/carers will begin at least six weeks prior to the end of the previous school year to enable parents/carers to plan and budget accordingly.

When inviting parents/carers to purchase items and activities, communications will include:

- clear descriptions of each of the three parent payment categories and the items and activities to purchase
- a link to the Department's Parent Payments Policy
- the details of the nominated school parent payment contact
- the availability of financial help for families' arrangements

The school will use the [Parent Payment Arrangements Template](#) when developing communications to parents/carers.

All communications will use language that is easy to understand, is culturally appropriate and if required translated into multiple languages. Refer to [Interpreting and Translation Services](#) for further information.

#### Uploading parent payment arrangements onto the school's website

The school will upload the School Council approved parent payment arrangements onto the school's public website six weeks before the end of the school year.

Our parent payment arrangements will include all communications with parents/carers in relation to parent payments including booklists and school fee schedules for each year level.

The school will use the [Parent Payment Arrangements Template](#) to complete their arrangements for each year level and upload the completed templates once they have been approved by School Council.

The school website will also include a link to the Department's Parent Payments Policy on the same page as the school's parent payment arrangements.

#### Parent payment contact person

The school will nominate and publicise the designated staff members to be parent/carer payment contacts to respond to queries and facilitate financial help for families' arrangements on behalf of the school.

This may be one or two staff members, including the Principal, Business Manager or Welfare Officer, who can be responsible for working with parents/carers to determine, negotiate and maintain appropriate responses on behalf of the school.

- In the event of a parent complaint, the school will refer to the *Complaints, Parents Policy*.
- Please refer also to the school's *Personal Devices – Access Policy, Financial Help for Families Policy* and to other links on the DET website below.

#### Evaluation

- This policy will be reviewed at least annually (or if guidelines change) as part of its ongoing improvement and report back to the school community (latest DET updates mid-July and early September 2020).

Please note:

#### Breaching the Parent Payments Policy

The Department conducts regular reviews of schools' parent payment arrangements to ensure schools adhere to the Parent Payments Policy.

If a parent/carer is of the view that a school is incorrectly applying the Parent Payments Policy or they are being incorrectly charged for items or activities, they will be able to raise concerns with the Department to follow up with the school.

If a school is found to be in breach of the Parent Payments Policy and incorrectly charging parents/carers for items or activities, the Department will work directly with and support the school to make the relevant changes and to re-communicate its parent payment arrangements to the school community. Where money has been incorrectly received from parents/carers, they may need to be credited or repaid.

A mandatory policy

School Council Approval Required

This update was ratified March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021

References:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/school/pal/parent-payments>

and

#### **Related policies**

Finance Manual — Financial Management for Schools July 2020

Financial Help for Families

Personal Devices — Access

School Council — Powers and Functions

Student Dress Code

Excursions (Including Camps)