

# PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

## 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 parents<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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



# Mandama Primary School

## Parent Payment Policy

### PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

Mandama Primary School requests payments from Parents/Carers under the following 3 categories only;

1. **Essential Student Learning Items-** are those items or services that are essential to support the course of instruction in the standard curriculum program that parents or carers are requested to pay the school to provide or may provide themselves, if appropriate. These items include:
  - **Student Bookpacks-** includes student stationery such as diary, pens, pencils, ruler, exercise books etc. The bookpacks are vital in supporting our school's learning/teaching program by providing students with basic items to assist in achieving the standards within the broad stages of schooling.
  - **Excursion Levy** – this levy covers activities that students are expected to attend as a part of their learning curriculum. Included in the levy is the cost of travel, entry fees or any other costs associated with the arranged activity.

Mandama Primary School spends considerable time selecting the most appropriate items and services to meet the needs of our students. Parents and guardians also have the option of purchasing equivalent materials from other sources. We ensure that costs are kept to a minimum and that payment requests as per above always support and enrich the schools learning and teaching program.

- **Optional Items-** In addition to the standard curriculum Mandama Primary School offers various items & activities throughout the year on a user-pays basis. These include, but are not limited to, the following; School Magazine, Graduation dinner, End of Year Celebrations e.g. Movies.
- **Voluntary Financial Contributions-** Mandama Primary School invites parents/carers to contribute to the school, for our project of 'Grounds Beautification'.

### PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

Mandama Primary School accepts the following payment methods;

- Cash, cheque, BPay, EFTPOS or Compass Pay.
- Parents/Carers are also most welcome to pay in instalments; we ask that you contact the school office to discuss the amount to be paid, frequency and method of payment. This is to ensure parents/carers have a payment plan in place that they are comfortable with and a plan that the school is aware of.

We request that parents/carers send the completed Bookpack & Requisites Return Form into the office noting one of the payment methods above or if items are being sourced elsewhere.

### FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

- **CSEF-** provides payments for eligible students to attend camps, sports and excursions. Families holding a valid means-tested concession card or temporary foster parents are eligible to apply and a special consideration category also exists.
- **State Schools Relief-** may cover the cost of new school uniforms, shoes, books and more for disadvantaged students. State Schools Relief only responds to requests from school principals, assistant principals or welfare coordinators. Parents or Carers who require assistance need to make an appointment with the school to discuss their situation.

- *Local community supports – Mandama run a School Breakfast club with the invaluable assistance of the **Grovedale Baptist Church**. Volunteers work in collaboration with our Student Welfare Coordinator. The **Lions Club of Grovedale, Waurin Ponds** generously supplies sandwiches to Mandama for students who are in need of sustenance.*

### **CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP**

*Low income families, parents and children may be experiencing circumstances that prevent them from participating in school life. It is important that every support is provided to ensure all can access and participate in learning experiences at school. Mandama Primary School will provide support to parents/carers experiencing hardship, including:*

- *Mandama Primary School has a nominated parent payment contact, the Business Manager, who parents can communicate with via phone, email or in person about their financial situation and related difficulties in making payments.*
- *The Business Manager is available to meet, communicate through email or discuss over the phone any family financial difficulty or circumstance. Parents/Carers are encouraged to contact the school to have a discussion with the Business Manager in which information of support available will be provided. The Business Manager will use discretion and negotiate appropriate forms of payment assistance.*

### **COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES**

- *This policy and the school's implementation will be communicated with the school community through advertising prominently on the school website, including the policy with Booklist payment information and ensuring hard copies are available in the office foyer.*
- *Parents/Carers have the opportunity to make general inquiries about charges at the general office between the hours of 9am until 4pm. Any issues can be raised via phone, email or by making a time to meet with the Business Manager.*

### **MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY**

- *The Department and Mandama Primary School are committed to ongoing improvement and ensuring that the impact of policies and practices on students are assessed in an ongoing way. Implementation of the Parent Payment Policy and school practice will be reviewed at least annually.*
- *School Council have a key role in ensuring the school level approach to parent payments reflects the shared expectations of the whole school community and is therefore responsible of monitoring effectiveness and the impact on parents/carers and students. The factors/measures that will be taken into account are the; transparency of processes and engagement with parents. The DET Transparency Framework will be used which assists in the implementation and compliance with the policy. The framework includes a Transparency Checklist Tool that enables self-assessment of open and transparent processes and practices. This tool is to be used to provide a good practice framework upon which policy implementation can be regularly reviewed and reported on.*

**Date of approval by School Council:**

**17<sup>th</sup> February 2020**