

Parent Payment Policy



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.

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.

Voluntary Financial Contributions

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

The attached diagram "**Understanding Parent Payment Categories**" – Appendix 1 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.” – Appendix 2](#)

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 families

In respect to the development of the school’s 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 Department of Education and Training policy is available from the website at www.education.vic.gov.au

Parent Payment Charges

Victorian legislation clearly states that instruction in the standard curriculum program must be provided free of charge to all students in Victorian government schools.

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

The standard curriculum program is made up of the eight key learning areas agreed to by the States, Territories and Commonwealth. These areas are: English, Mathematics, Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, the Arts, Languages, Health and Physical Education, and Technologies.

The standard curriculum also includes the four capability areas: Critical and Creative Thinking, Intercultural, Ethical, and Personal and Social.

To clarify, 'the standard curriculum for years F-10' means the implementation of the Victorian Curriculum F-10.

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* ensures the provision of free instruction in the standard curriculum program, and empowers school councils to charge for goods and services used in the course of instruction, and to raise funds.

Schools are funded to deliver a quality education based on the standard curriculum. Schools receive additional government funds based on the needs of the students or location.

Parent payments are a valuable contribution to enhancing and enriching the educational experience of the students at Northcote Primary School. These payments allow the school to offer enhanced programs and opportunities.

This policy aims to assist School Council in the allocation of resources and to ensure a transparent and fair process is in place for all parent payments. The policy will also aim to ensure that the school-level policy for parent payments and voluntary financial contributions is fully compliant with the Victorian State Government's Department of Education and Training policy.

The policy also emphasises that all children should have access to the standard curriculum regardless of their parents' ability to pay.

The policy makes clear that the authority for the final determination and approval of essential services associated with instruction in the standard curriculum program is held by the Principal

Payment arrangements and methods

- School will provide parents and guardians with early notice of requests for payment of essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions.

- Parents are to be notified by the end of October, the projected parent payments for the following year.
- Payment requests will be accompanied by the following information:
 - *That parents and guardians are required to provide essential education items and have the option of purchasing these through the school or providing equivalent materials from other sources*
 - *a clear description of each of the three parent payment categories*
 - *the availability of alternative payment options and an invitation to contact the principal if the parent wishes to discuss these*
 - *details of how payments or contributions will be spent by the school*
 - *a copy of the school-level policy.*
- New families will receive the information as part of the school information package for new preps in the Ready Set Go program in Term 4, or on enrolment.
- Parents will be encouraged to pay for essential items as early as practicable but encouraged to have payments finalised by the end of Term 1 each year.
- School will provide parents and guardians with processes to receive payment by cash, cheque or electronic payment.
- Parents and guardians have the option of purchasing equivalent materials from other sources. If parents and guardians choose to provide equivalent materials, this should be done in consultation with the school, as items should meet the specifications provided by the school.
- Parents and guardians who experience difficulties providing or paying the school to provide essential education items, will be encouraged to make an appointment with the principal or other nominated senior staff member to discuss alternative payment methods.
- Where parents have difficulty making payments, the principal will discuss the range of support options available, and negotiate an appropriate alternative arrangement, such as payment by instalments.

Procedures

- Parent payments should be kept to a minimum and must not exceed the cost of the relevant materials or services to the student.
- Students will not be treated differently, denied access to the standard curriculum program, or refused instruction on the basis of payments not being made for education items, services or voluntary financial contributions.
- The school will not withhold access to enrolment or advancement to the next year level as a condition of payment of essential education items, optional extras or voluntary financial contributions.
- Unpaid Optional Extras payments may compromise a student's ability to be involved in the Optional activity in the future.
- The school will ensure that the status and details of any payments or non-payments by parents and guardians are confidential.

- The payment policy must meet the community's expectations and is available to parents and guardians upon request.
- Payment requests, letters or CASES 21 parent payment statements for student materials and services charges are broadly itemised within the appropriate category must clearly identify which category the items fall into, i.e. essential education items, optional education items or voluntary financial contributions.
- Schools may issue only one request for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice.
- It is not acceptable to use coercion or to harass parents and guardians to obtain payment.
- Receipts will be issued to parents upon making payment.
- Parents and guardians are to be provided with an alternative option for their children if they choose not to participate in an excursion or camp.
- Parent payment statements for unpaid essential education items or optional items accepted by parents are generated and distributed on a regular basis, but not more than once a month.
- Under no circumstances can collectors of any type, including debt collectors, be used to obtain any funds from parents and guardians.

Family Support Options

Families may experience financial difficulties and may be unable to meet the full or part payments requested. The Principal and School Council will exercise sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of students and their families when considering parent payment fees.

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. The school has a '**Hardship Policy**' (located on school website www.northcoteps.vic.edu.au) with written hardship arrangements that include a proactive approach to providing support for parents experiencing financial difficulty.

There are also a number of cost-saving strategies that the school will implement to reduce the impact of school costs on families. The school investigates multiple suppliers in order to offer a broad price variety and ensure supplier costs are competitive. Camps and Excursions costs are minimised wherever possible by looking at transport alternatives or any 'hidden' costs.

There are a range of different support options available for all families to help make the costs of education more affordable.

Parents experiencing financial hardship can contact the Principal to discuss payment arrangements with.

Government Assistant Programs

The [Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund \(CSEF\)](#), 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 eligibility category also exist.

For further options, please see appendix 2.

Engaging with Parents

In respect to the school's development of its parent payments, School Council 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

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

This policy was ratified by School Council: October 2016

Appendix 1 - 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

Appendix 2

COST SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

There are a range of different support options available for all families to help make the costs of education more affordable.

REDUCING SCHOOL COSTS

There are a number of cost-saving strategies that schools can implement to reduce the impact of school costs on families.

LOWERING THE COST OF ESSENTIAL STUDENT LEARNING ITEMS

Schools should look to engage multiple suppliers in order to offer a broad price variety and ensure supplier costs are competitive.

Schools should outline which Essential Student Learning Items on their booklists can be supplied by families themselves (i.e. substituted for low-cost or generic versions, or substituted for items that the family already owns, e.g. stationery, uniform items, school bag, and calculator).

Iron-on school logos should be available for uniform items that can be purchased at a lower cost but require a school logo, e.g. hats, skivvies.

Schools should ensure that costs are minimised on excursions and should consider whether there are:

- any 'hidden' additional costs built into the excursion that may be unaffordable for some students, e.g. opportunity to purchase meals or souvenirs.
- transport alternatives – is it appropriate for students to walk or take public transport between locations?
- any virtual excursion or conferencing opportunities that could also enrich student's engagement with the learning and teaching program. (For more information, see: [Virtual Learning, Virtual Conferencing](#))

SECOND-HAND STRATEGIES

Schools need to be aware of second-hand options available for items commonly required by students and communicate these to parents (e.g. uniforms, stationery, textbooks, and calculators).

Second-hand options may include:

- A school-based uniform shop that sells both new and second-hand items
- Swap days at the start, middle and/or end of the year for uniforms, textbooks etc.
- Trading in second hand items through the school uniform or book supplier
- Online platforms, such as:
 - [State Schools' Relief clk2sell app](#)
 - www.sustainableschoolshop.com.au
 - trading websites (e.g. gumtree) or social media networks (e.g. private Facebook groups)

SCHOOL LOANS

Some resources can be loaned from the school for periods that can vary from daily to yearly, depending on the school and the resource. Some schools may require a deposit or assurance that damages will be paid for by the responsible party. Items available for loan could include text books (digital and/or hard-copy), devices, essential equipment such as graphic calculators etc.

GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

- The [Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund](#) 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 eligibility 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 are struggling need to make an appointment with the school to discuss their situation.
- [Student Scholarships](#) are generally awarded on the basis of academic achievement, participation in the school and local community, or financial need, but are not limited to these. The Department of Education and Training administers 35 different student scholarships, equating to approximately 250 scholarship awards as some scholarships have more than one award.

COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

Schools are encouraged to develop strong links with local services and welfare groups which can provide specialist support and assistance to students and families in financial crisis. Connections with local businesses can also help families by providing discounts for low income families on school-related purchases (e.g. shoes, stationery).

INFORMATION SERVICES

- [Crisis Referral Information System \(CRIS\) Online Directory](#) provides a broad range of information for people seeking welfare assistance, advice and general referral and support. The online directory contains comprehensive information on services and organisations such as those providing support in respect to accommodation, domestic violence, drug & alcohol treatment, health, material aid and mental health.
- [Community Information and Support Victoria \(CISVic\)](#) is the peak body representing local community information and support services. Its member agencies assist people experiencing personal and financial difficulties by providing information, referral and support services including emergency relief.
- [Emergency Relief \(ER\) Victoria](#) is the peak body for the Victorian emergency relief sector, with over 100 member organisations offering material aid and support to families experiencing a financial crisis or emergency.
- [Financial Counselling Victoria \(FCV\)](#) is a non-profit organisation providing financial counselling through advocacy and information to disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the community. FCV can provide advice over the phone, email or in person and can assist with referrals to other community and government support such as legal advice, material aid, and emergency relief.

COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

- [School Breakfast clubs](#)
School Breakfast clubs run throughout Victoria either by the school community or in collaboration with a non-government organisation. While [Foodbank](#) has established the School Breakfast Clubs program for 250 of Victoria's most disadvantaged schools with Victorian Government support, other organisations such as the [Australian Red Cross](#) and [Ardoch Youth Foundation](#) also assist schools to source donations to run School Breakfast programs.
- [Saver Plus](#) is an initiative of Brotherhood of St Laurence and ANZ, delivered locally by community organisations in 22 locations in Victoria. Saver Plus assists individuals and families on lower incomes to have every dollar up to \$500 saved over a 10-month period matched by ANZ to go towards education-related costs.
- [The Smith Family's 'Learning for Life program](#) provides financial support, guidance and mentoring for disadvantaged students. The Smith Family works with a select number of schools and may require referral from the school principal.

- [Travellers Aid Australia's Pathways to Education program](#) provides student travel passes to young people experiencing financial difficulties, enabling them to travel to school or other forms of training and education. The program is limited to students who attend secondary education in an alternative setting, namely community schools and secondary education at a tertiary institution.
- [A Start in Life](#) is an Australian charity based in New South Wales that provides assistance to disadvantaged students from kindergarten through to tertiary studies.
- [Good Shepherd Microfinance](#) provides affordable financial programs for people on low or limited incomes that may assist families to afford educational costs and other expenses.
- The [No Interest Loan Scheme \(NILS\)](#) provides access to fair and safe credit (up to \$1,200) for the purchase of essential goods and services delivered through a network of local community organisations in 650 locations across Australia, including through Financial Counselling Victoria and Travellers Aid.

COMMONWEALTH FAMILY ASSISTANCE

The Commonwealth Government provides a range of payments and services to help families look after their children's health, education and other family issues.

- The Child Care Benefit helps eligible families with the cost of outside school hours care, vacation care and registered care. For more information about eligibility and making claims, see Centrelink: [Child Care Benefit](#)
- To be eligible for either of the Family Tax Benefits, A or B, or a Parenting Payment, families must meet an income test. For more information, see: [Centrelink: Families](#)
- Depending on family circumstances, young people between 15 and 24 years of age may be eligible for [Youth Allowance](#), [Newstart Allowance](#) or [ABSTUDY](#). These payments provide financial support while young people are looking for work, studying, training or undertaking an Australian Apprenticeship.
- [Health Care Card](#) provides help with the with the cost of prescription medicine under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, Commonwealth-funded medical services, and access to state, territory and local government concessions. Families may be eligible for a Health Care Card if they receive specific Commonwealth payments or supplements or the maximum rate of Family Tax Benefit A.
- [Centrepay](#) is a free, voluntary service for Centrelink customers to pay expenses as regular deductions from their Centrelink payments. Centrepay can help families to pay for many types of bills, such as education fees and expenses, child care, rent, electricity, gas and water bills, or medical services.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [Ardoch School Costs Guide 2016](#)
Ardoch Youth Foundation has published a comprehensive list of support options available to provide financial assistance to families and reduce school costs.
- [Reducing School Costs](#)
Australian Securities and Investments Commission's (ASIC) Money Smart website has some helpful recommendations of how to reduce school costs and includes a comprehensive online budget planner to help families work out their school expenses.