

VCASS PARENT PAYMENT POLICY 2020

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

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:

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.

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 –](#)

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
 - campus, 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

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

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

- **PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES**

- *VCASS works in close partnership with parents and the broader school community to provide the best educational opportunities and outcomes for students both inside and outside the classroom. Through this partnership, parents understand that the contribution they make to their children's education, has an important role in enriching the school's specialisation and teaching program. Parent contributions are highly valued and benefit students and results in improved outcomes, wellbeing and engagement.*

- **Essential Education Items**

At VCASS, School Council consider the following items to be essential for student participation in the curriculum program.

Classroom Resources, Compass Services, ID and access cards, Lock Rental, Technology Equipment, resources, software and Infrastructure, Mental Health and Well Being Programs, Kerrupon Program, Shaw Program, Parent Guest Speakers, Study Skills, Graduation and Award Presentations, Participation in Literary Events including Guest speakers (Book Week, Premier's Reading Challenge), essential excursions, performances and theatre presentations. Includes all school software and additional bandwidth of the school wifi.

- **Optional Education Items**

At VCASS, items that come under this category are the specialist streams; Specialist Music, Specialist Dance, Visual Arts Extension Program, and Theatre Arts Extension Program. Parents are required to meet the total cost of these programs as per DET guidelines.

Participation in the Visual Arts and Theatre Arts Extension Programs are conditional on parents complying with VCASS payment terms. (As per payment arrangements below.)

- **Optional Enrichment Items.**

At VCASS, items that come under this category are Cecchetti Program, Royal Academy of Dance Program (RAD) and Private Dance Lessons

Participation in the enrichment programs are conditional on payment of the optional education items fees and must be paid prior to commencement.

- **1.1. Voluntary Financial Contributions**

Voluntary contributions allow VCASS to provide additional resources to further enrich the curriculum. Parents and guardians are invited to make a general contribution and their support is much appreciated.

- **1.2. Library & Building Gift Funds**

Parents and guardians are offered the opportunity to receive a tax deduction for donations to our Library and Building Gift Funds. These donations enable excellent resourcing of the Library and assist us to maintain our buildings in peak condition and extend our facilities to accommodate our enriched curriculum.

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

Parents and guardians will be provided with notice of payment requests prior to the new school year. Payments are requested prior to the commencement of the school year in which the programs are operating. Receipts are issued upon payment in Cases 21.

Payment for Visual Arts and Theatre Arts Extension Programs can be made in three instalments. The first instalment must be paid by Tuesday 18th December 2018, the second instalment before the end of term one and the final instalment before the end of term two. Full participation in these extension programs is dependent on this timeline being met.

Our preferred payment option is via your COMPASS log in. Payments through COMPASS are made in full, or COMPASS allows you to commence a Payment Plan where payments can be made in instalments at regular intervals. Payments may also be made at Reception or via credit card over the telephone.

If parents wish to discuss alternative payment arrangements, we invite you to contact the Business Manager, Stacy Mitchell 03 8644 8644 or smitchell@vcass.vic.edu.au for a confidential discussion.

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

The school recognises that families may sometimes experience financial difficulties. A range of support options are available

- Payment plans are available through our Compass System
- Conveyance Allowance (if eligible) - Reimbursement of yearly travel ticket provided by the State Government will be allocated to school accounts to offset outstanding charges (prioritising essential learning items). Refunds will be made to any family upon request or when students leave VCASS. Families can choose to donate the balance to the school.
- CSEF - The Victorian Government "Camps, Sports and Excursion Fund is available to parents with Centrelink cards
- Local community supports such as Western Chances can be applied for.

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

- Parents experiencing hardship should contact Stacy Mitchell for a confidential discussion.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

- The full Department of Education and Training Parent Payment Policy is available by [clicking here](#)
- Parents and guardians who wish to make comments or general inquiries should email Stacy Mitchell.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

- This policy will be reviewed as part of the annual cycle by the Finance Sub Committee for recommendation to School Council. This review will occur each year.
- Responsibility: Principal and School Council
- References: Education and Training Reform Act 2006, Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007, School Policy and Advisory Guide (DET website)

Date of approval by School Council: 30th October 2019