

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY 2019-2021

Castlemaine North 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 parents 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:

PRINCIPLES

1. **Educational value:** Student learning, aspirations and wellbeing are paramount when schools determine their parent payments practices
2. **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
3. **Affordability:** Cost to parents is kept to a minimum and is affordable for most families at the school
4. **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
5. **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
6. **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:

1. Items students consume or take possession of are accurately costed
2. Payment requests are broadly itemised within the appropriate category
3. Parents are advised that they have the option of purchasing equivalent Essential Student Learning Items themselves, in consultation with the school
4. 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
5. 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.
6. 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
7. The status and details of any financial arrangements are kept confidential and only shared with relevant school personnel
8. Parents experiencing hardship are not pursued for outstanding school fees from one year to the next
9. Use of debt collectors to obtain outstanding school funds owed to the school from parents is not permitted
10. There will be only one reminder notice to parents for voluntary financial contributions per year
11. 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

IMPLEMENTATION

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

School Council supplements DET funds by requesting payments from parents under three categories: Essential student learning items, Optional items or Voluntary financial contributions.

1. Essential student learning items costs: Grades Prep – Year 6 \$150
 - a) Items the student takes temporary or permanent possession of e.g. activity books, exercise books, stationery, Grade 5/6 netbook computer lease - \$150
 - b) Materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished articles e.g. Art projects
 - c) Activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend e.g. excursions, incursions, camps, district sporting events, transport to events
 - d) School uniform
2. Optional items
 - a) Items the student purchases or hires e.g. class photos, school magazine, concert DVDs
 - b) Activities the student purchases e.g. instrumental music tuition
3. Voluntary financial contributions
 - a) General voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school (these contributions or donations are not tax deductible) e.g. school improvement fund as decided on a needs basis with School Council approval
 - b) Donations to a building fund or library fund (if these funds have been endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office and have a Deductible Gift Recipients status). Donations to these funds are tax deductible to the donor.

These payment requests support and enrich the school's learning and teaching program.

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

1. Parents and guardians will be provided with early notice of payment requests for essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions (i.e. a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous school year).
2. Costs will be kept to a minimum with payment requests/letters fair and reasonable.
3. Alternative payment options e.g. to pay in instalments, are available through the school and parents are encouraged to make an appointment with the Principal to discuss circumstances and available options.
4. Payment requests to parents will be itemised and the category each item falls under will be clearly identified as an essential education item, optional extra or voluntary financial contribution.
5. Receipts will be issued to parents immediately upon making payment.
6. Reminders for unpaid essential education items or optional extras will be generated and distributed on a regular basis to parents, but not more than once a month.
7. All records of payments or contributions and any outstanding payments by parents and guardians will be kept confidential.
8. Details of how payments will be spent by the school are available to parents.
9. Parents will be advised that they have the option of purchasing equivalent Essential Student Learning Items themselves, in consultation with the school.
10. Administrative and financial processes are compliant with Departmental requirements such as CASES 21 financial reporting.

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

CNPS will ensure families are aware of the range of support options available to them, if experiencing difficulty in paying for essential items and the process involved in accessing them.

These include:

1. Second hand and low cost options e.g. school clothing pool, low cost suppliers
2. Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, available to eligible families.
3. State Schools Relief support via the Principal to assist with uniforms, shoes and stationery.
4. Centrepay who can arrange to have amounts deducted from Centrelink payments
5. Local community supports.

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

In the context of the commitment and responsibility the school has to be responsive to parents experiencing either short-term or long-term hardships, CNPS will provide for an individualized, family-centred and student outcomes approach, that necessarily requires thoughtful consideration of each situation. In addition a proactive approach will be taken and discretely employ early identification and engagement strategies to identify families who may be experiencing hardship.

All parents are able to contact the Principal by telephone on 5472 1391 or in person), about their financial situation and related difficulties in making payments and with whom payment arrangements can be discussed.

Examples of payment arrangements include:

1. Deferred payment or the extension of payment deadlines
2. Flexible payment plans – beyond what is available in the school's standard policy
3. Cost saving options available at the school, such as second-hand uniform, loan of school resources

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

The school community can access this policy and the arrangements for financial hardship through the following means:

1. CNPS Parent Payment Policy and Frequently Asked Questions published on the school website
2. DET Parent Payment Policy published on the school website
3. Reference to key information distributed with the new year Parent Payment information in the school newsletter

Parents are able to make general inquiries about charges via the school office, in person, via email or phone.

Business manager: Jan Cox

Phone: 5472 1391

Email: castlemaine.north.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au

Parents are able to raise any issues or concerns about charges with the Principal - in person, via email or phone.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

School Council has the responsibility to monitor the implementation of this policy. In doing so, it will focus on the following:

1. Transparency of processes
2. Communication and engagement with the community

This Parent Payment Policy will be reviewed as part of the school's bi-annual financial policy review cycle.

Date of approval by School Council: March 2019

Review Cycle Date: March 2021

Signature of School Council President:

Signature of Principal:

REFERENCES

1. DET Parent Payment Policy
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/Pages/paretnpayments.aspx>
Education and Training Reform Act 2006
2. Finance Manual for Victorian Government Schools, June 2016