

○ Parent Payments to Specimen Hill PS

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 our school 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. (At Specimen Hill Primary School, we purchase all student requisites in a bulk order, and these items are used in the classrooms and given to the children as needed. These items include workbooks, scrapbooks, pens, pencils, textas.... School Council has approved a payment for "Essential Student learning Items" @ \$100 per child.)

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. ICT, school grounds projects, library fund or for new equipment. Only some Voluntary Financial Contributions are tax-deductible.

In parent payments, schools must adhere to the following principles:

Principles

- **Educational value:** Student learning, aspirations and wellbeing are paramount when schools determine their parent payments practices
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- **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.

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.”

Families can also be supported with uniforms through State Schools Relief and free pre-loved uniforms available from the school.

Families who have a Centrelink Benefit can claim the Camps Sports & Excursions (CSEF) Fund.

The school can also advise Families on request of local community supports.

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.

Consideration of hardship

The school will provide support to parents experiencing hardship, by:

- Providing information in the schools Information Book; School Newsletter and Website outlining that parents can communicate with the school Principal by phone, email or in person about their financial situation and related difficulties in making payments.

- The School Principal can discretely approach families who may need support and special payment arrangements if the parents are disconnected from the school or are experiencing hardship.

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.

Communication with families

- The School Principal is available by phone, email or in person for parents to raise any issues or to make general inquiries.

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Parent Payments

Policy

This policy outlines the ways in which school councils can request payments or voluntary contributions from parents and ensures that parent payment practices in schools are consistent, transparent and that all children have access to the standard curriculum.

Summary

- 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 under 3 categories: Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Contributions.
- Schools must consider the [Financial Help for Families Policy](http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/financial-help-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)

Details

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 8 key learning areas:

1. English
2. Mathematics
3. Sciences (including physics, chemistry and biology)

4. Humanities and social sciences (including history, geography, economics, business, civics and citizenship)
5. The arts
6. Languages
7. Health and physical education
8. 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 3 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 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](http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/parent-payment/guidance) <<http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/parent-payment/guidance>> tab)
- 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.

Refer to Essential Student Learning Items in the Guidance section for further information.

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 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 who may be experiencing either short-term or long-term financial hardship.

Schools must:

- ensure costs to parents 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](http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/financial-help-families/policy) <<http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/financial-help-families/policy>> 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 <http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/parent-payment/guidance> tab](http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/parent-payment/guidance))

Schools must use the [Parent Payment Arrangements Template](https://content.sdp.education.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-08/Parent-Payments-Arrangements-template-2020_2.docx) 

<https://content.sdp.education.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-08/Parent-Payments-Arrangements-template-2020_2.docx> to develop arrangements and communicate these to parents.

Definitions



Standard curriculum

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

Related policies

- [Finance Manual — Financial Management for Schools](http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/finance-manual/policy) <http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/finance-manual/policy>
- [Financial Help for Families](http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/financial-help-families/policy) <http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/financial-help-families/policy>
- [Personal Devices — Access](http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/personal-devices/policy) <http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/personal-devices/policy>
- [School Council — Powers and Functions](http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-council-powers-and-functions/policy) <http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/school-council-powers-and-functions/policy>
- [Student Dress Code](http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/student-dress-code/policy) <http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/student-dress-code/policy>
- [Students with Disability](http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/students-disability/policy) <http://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/students-disability/policy>

Relevant legislation

- [Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 \(Vic\)](https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/charter-human-rights-and-responsibilities-act-2006)  <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/charter-human-rights-and-responsibilities-act-2006>
- [Education Training and Reform Act 2006 \(Vic\)](https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/education-and-training-reform-act-2006)  <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/education-and-training-reform-act-2006>

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Scope

- Schools
- School councils