

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the Department of Education and Training (DET) 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.

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.

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 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.

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.

In implementing this policy, the school will adhere to the following 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

A. In implementing this policy, the school will adhere to the following practices:

- all requests for payment, (new year fee letters, camp notices, swimming notices, etc) will be fair and reasonable and be accompanied by the following information:

- the availability of alternative payment options for parents who are experiencing financial difficulties (eg: instalments) and an invitation to contact the principal if the parent wishes to discuss these.
 - the option for parents of purchasing equivalent Essential Student Learning items themselves, in consultation with the school. (not including activities set by the school).
 - details of how payments or contributions will be spent by the school.
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- items that students consume or take possession of are accurately costed.
 - notice of requests for payment of essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions will be issued six weeks prior to the end of the previous school year.
 - administrative and financial processes are compliant with Departmental requirements such as CASES 21 financial reporting.
 - all students have access to the standard curriculum and 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.
 - the Principal will ensure that all staff are familiar with and adhere to this policy.

Family Support options:

BPPS ensures 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:

- access to State Schools' Relief support via the Principal to assist with uniforms, shoes, textbooks, and stationery
- the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, available to eligible families, to cover the costs of excursions, camps and sporting activities
- welfare and support agencies that have established partnership arrangements with schools to provide further assistance to students and their families.
- Internal provision through the annual cash budget.

Consideration of Hardship:

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

All parents are able to contact Assistant Principal, Randal Symons, with whom payment arrangements can be discussed.

Examples of payment arrangements:

- Reduced fees
- Deferred payment or the extension of payment deadlines
- Flexible payment plans – beyond what is available in the school's standard policy
- Cost saving options available at the school, such as second hand uniform, loan of school resources, eg: iPads

Communication with families:

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

- BPPS Parent Payment Policy and Frequently Asked Questions published on the school website
- DET Parent Payment Policy published on the school website
- Reference to key information distributed with the new year School Fees letter

Opportunities available for parents to raise any issues or make general inquiries about charges can be made via the school office; in person, via email or phone and should be directed to the Assistant Principal or to the Business Manager.

Ph: 9857 5157

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Evaluation:

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

- Transparency of processes
- Communication and Engagement with the school community
- Outcome of hardship cases

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

References:

DET Parent Payment Policy

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/parent-payment/policy>

Education and Training Reform Act 2006

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)