

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Strathmore 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

- **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 – 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



Strathmore Primary School

Parent Payment Policy

The Strathmore Primary School community shares a vision to build an education system that champions equity and excellence and ensures that every child and young person is supported to learn. Underpinning Strathmore Primary School's aim for excellence is a commitment that all students have access to the opportunities to succeed in life, regardless of their background or circumstance, and that no-one is left behind. This enables an approach to educational achievement, engagement and wellbeing which draws on the best evidence and is responsive to local circumstances and needs.

Strathmore Primary School will work 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, in all its various forms, has an important role in enriching the school's learning and teaching programs and improving educational outcomes. The commitment from parents to contribute benefits students and results in improved achievement outcomes, wellbeing and engagement in learning. Strathmore Primary School will design and develop its learning and teaching programs drawing on the best educational knowledge and practices and offer broad and enriched opportunities to students. Learning and teaching programs vary across schools to reflect priorities, decisions and needs of each school and this, in turn, informs the payments requested by schools.

Strathmore Primary School is best placed to make decisions about its learning and teaching programs and how to ensure there is equity and access to education for all students as well as a robust and comprehensive learning program that supports student aspirations. Strathmore Primary School is committed to creating a positive, connected school community and implementing good practices forms part of this commitment. With regard to parent payments, this includes consideration of how parent payments are set, clearly communicating how decisions are made and recognising that some families experiencing hardship may need additional consideration and support. Strathmore Primary School will establish clear expectations and provide support that promotes inclusion and strengthens partnerships with parents and the school community to continue improving student outcomes, wellbeing and engagement.

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

In according with DET policy, parent payment charges at Strathmore Primary School are classified into three categories, being 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 of which students take possession. At Strathmore Primary School, these items include:

- Classroom consumables for **Literacy, Numeracy and Inquiry Learning**, such as, but not limited to:
 - Exercise books and visual diaries
 - Paper, including coloured cover paper
 - Writing and drawing materials
 - General stationery consumables
 - Construction materials
 - Science consumables
 - Digital subscriptions (e.g. Mathletics, Spellodrome, Sunshine Online, CARS and STARS, PAT Assessments)
- **Languages (Italian)** consumables, such as, but not limited to:
 - Exercise books
 - Paper

- Writing and drawing materials
- Digital subscriptions (e.g. Linguascope)
- **Arts (Visual/Performing)** consumables, such as, but not limited to:
 - Fabrics and textiles
 - Paper and mediums
 - Paints
 - Adhesives
 - Drawing materials
 - Construction materials
 - Scrap books, visual diaries and exercise books

The essential learning items in these categories enable students to participate in the **standard learning program**. Each year, overall cost of Essential Learning Items, along with a breakdown of the cost amount for these areas will be provided to parents. The school is in the best position to source quality items using parent payments for Essential Student Learning Items whilst also ensuring value for money, based on bulk purchasing.

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.

At Strathmore Primary School, camps, excursions, sports and direct experiences (e.g. guest speakers, performances and workshops at school, etc.) are categorised in “Optional Items”. Permission and payment is required for students to attend these activities with students being able to access these activities on a “user-pays” basis. The school has chosen to invoice for these activities separately closer to the time of the event. In requesting payment for these activities, the school highly recommends student participation, as these additions to the standard curriculum offer many benefits for student engagement and learning. If payment is not received prior to the activities, students may not be able to participate.

Families who are experiencing hardship may be able to access supports, such as the “Camps, Sports and Excursions Funding” (please see further information below) or are welcome to contact the school’s “Parent Payment Contact” to discuss the possibility of a payment plan or consideration of circumstances of hardship.

Voluntary Financial Contributions are able to be requested by the school. 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. At Strathmore Primary School, parents are invited to make voluntary contributions for:

- ICT and Digital Technologies (e.g. infrastructure including hardware and software)
- Buildings and Grounds
- Library Fund

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

Strathmore Primary School offers the following options for payments:

- Compass
- bPay (biller code and reference number can be located on the family statement)
- EFTPOS, cash or cheque (in person at the Office)
- Payment plan (please contact the school’s “Parent Payment Contact”, Robyn Emerson, to discuss options)

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

Camps, Sports and Excursions Funding (CSEF) – Families holding a valid means-tested concession card or temporary foster parents are eligible to apply for the “Camps, Sports and Excursions Funding” (CSEF). This amounts to \$125 per child which can be used to help cover the costs of camps, excursions, direct experience (e.g.

performances, guest speakers, etc.) and swimming. CSEF applications are open from the first day of Term 1 2019. Parents or legal guardians are required to submit a new CSEF application form each year.

State Schools Relief – State Schools' Relief is a not for profit organisation that supports the needs of underprivileged Victorian government school students by providing new school uniforms, shoes and educational resources. State Schools Relief work side by side with all Victorian Primary, Secondary, Special Developmental and Language schools to ensure that any students facing hardship have the necessary clothing and appropriate footwear for school. Families experiencing hardship may contact the school's "Parent Payment Contact" (Robyn Emerson) to discuss how to access support through State Schools Relief.

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

Strathmore Primary School endeavors to ensure that every student has access to educational programs regardless of economic situation. Students are not treated differently, denied access to the **standard curriculum program**, refused instruction or disadvantaged on the basis of payments not being made for Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items or Voluntary Financial Contributions.

Strathmore Primary School seeks to assist families experiencing long term hardship or short term crisis in a confidential, case by case basis so that every student is provided with an opportunity to participate in the standard curriculum program. In addition to the family support options detailed above, the school has a "Parent Payment Contact" who may be contacted by families to discuss supports that the school can consider, such as a payment plan of installments, or consideration of circumstances of hardship.

The school's Parent Payment Contact is **Robyn Emerson** (student administration). It is also possible to contact a member of school leadership, such as the Principal or Assistant Principal/s or a child's classroom teacher to discuss support. All of these options are contactable either in person at school, via the school's phone number (03 9379 3991) or through the school's e-mail address strathmore.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au

Upon making contact, it may be determined that a meeting to discuss the nature of the hardship along with options and strategies will be beneficial. As part of the process, the school may request information regarding the circumstances of hardship, which may include documentation such as:

- Doctor or Hospital letters
- Death Certificate
- Domestic Violence orders
- Centrelink statement for pension or allowance
- Current payslips

The school will treat all information held manually with due care, and will only disclose information in accordance within Department of Education and Training guidelines and policies.

Strathmore Primary School will adopt a proactive approach to engage with families who demonstrate a disconnection from school activities who may be experiencing hardship, such as discretely approaching families who may need support and special payment arrangements.

REFUNDS

As per DET guidelines, our school will consider requests for partial or full refunds of payments made by parents on a case-by-case basis taking into account the individual circumstances. Generally we will not be able to refund payments made for items purchased or costs that have already been paid where those funds have already been transferred to a third party. For example, excursion, direct experience or camp costs when a child becomes unwell and cannot attend in circumstances where the payment has already been made or committed to a third party and no refund is available to the school.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

Strathmore Primary School will communicate its Parent Payment Policy and Implementation document on the school website. Additionally, the DET infographic “Understanding Parent Payment Categories” that is found in the policy, will also be placed on the website with a separate link to ensure visibility for families. The school will also place the DET “Parent Payment in Victorian Government Schools – Frequently Asked Questions for Parents” document on the website. New families to the school will be provided with these documents upon enrolment.

The school will communicate with families in the following manner regarding parent payment requests:

- A statement of requests for parent payments for the up-coming year no later than six weeks prior to the end of the school year, categorised into Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions – this will be accompanied with the DET infographic “Understanding Parent Payment Categories” as found in the earlier section of the policy, along with the DET “Parent Payment in Victorian Government Schools – Frequently Asked Questions for Parents” document
- The school will issue invoices for outstanding payments for Essential Student Learning Items once per calendar month, in accordance with DET guidelines
- The school will issue permission and payment notices through Compass for excursions, direct experiences and camps within a reasonable timeframe of the activity taking place – whilst the school highly encourages student participation, as these are Optional Items, permission and payment will be required by the due date and prior to student attendance (parents experiencing hardship are encouraged to consider applying for CSEF support or contacting the school’s Parent Payment Contact to discuss options)
- The school will issue invoices for outstanding payments for Optional Items where a parent has engaged with the school in a payment plan, due to hardship, once per calendar month, as per DET guidelines
- The school will issue one request for Voluntary Financial Contributions and then reminder notice per calendar year (discretion will be applied where there is a known case of financial hardship)

Parents may contact the school’s “Parent Payment Contact”, Robyn Emerson, via the Office, to make general inquiries. If families feel the need to raise an issue, concern or complaint regarding parent payments, these may also be directed to the school’s Parent Payment Contact, who will take details of the nature of the matter and then confer with school leadership to determine the course of action.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

School Council takes responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Parent Payment Policy, including identifying factors and measures to be taken into account, such as:

- Ensuring that the school is able to achieve the goals of its standard curriculum with financial viability
- Ensuring that payments required and requested by the school are reasonable, appropriate and consistent with the expectations of the school community
- Transparency of processes
- The communication of the policy and implementation and engagement with parents
- Ensuring that processes ensure equity for all students and consideration for those who experience circumstances of hardship

The Parent Payment Policy and Implementation will be reviewed annually by School Council.

Date of approval by School Council

Monday 29th October, 2018