



# PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

**School Name: BULLEEN HEIGHTS 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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

#### 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



# BULLEEN HEIGHTS SCHOOL

## *Parent Payment Policy*

### **PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES**

Parent contributions at Bulleen Heights School assist the school in providing a personalised teaching and learning program for all students, in line with the Department of Education and Training initiatives and the school priorities. Bulleen Heights School Council supplements Department of Education and Training funds by requesting payments from parents for the following items:

**Essential education items** are those items or services that parents or guardians are requested to provide or pay the school, that are essential to support the course of instruction in the standard curriculum program, to provide or may provide themselves, if appropriate.

These items include:

- materials that the student takes possession of, including text books and student stationery, sensory items, Picture Exchange Communication System materials, online subscriptions.
- materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished articles (e.g. home economics, photography, catering)
- transport and entrance for incursions and excursions which all students are expected to attend.

**Optional education items** (or non-essential materials and services) are those that are provided in addition to the standard curriculum program, and which are offered to all students. These optional extras are provided on a user-pays basis and if parents and guardians choose to access them for students, they will be required to pay for them.

These items include:

- student computer printing for personal use
- extra-curricular programs or activities e.g. Swimming, Camps
- school-based performances, productions and events, e.g. Oscars, Graduation
- school magazines, class photographs.

**Voluntary financial contributions** are those items and services that parents or guardians are invited to make as a tax deductible donation to the school, e.g. for building & grounds maintenance, a library or technology funds. Bulleen Heights School is registered as a Charitable Organisation.

### **PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS**

Parents and guardians will be provided with early notice of payment requests for essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions (e.g. a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous school year).

Costs will be kept to a minimum with payment requests/letters fair and reasonable. To further assist parents with payments, payment options have been developed:

- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| Option A | Full amount at the beginning of Term 1,        |
| Option B | Payment at the beginning of each Term          |
| Option C | Half yearly payment (beginning of Terms 1 & 3) |

Parents are able to enter into confidential payment arrangements by contacting the Business Manager. Payments may be requested but not required prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used.

Payment requests to parents will be itemised and the category each item falls under will be clearly identified as an essential education item, optional education item or voluntary financial contribution. Receipts will be issued to parents upon making payment.

## **FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS**

A range of support options are available to assist eligible parents:

- Camps Sports & Excursion Fund
- State Schools' Relief (State Schools' Relief "clk2sell" app)
- Family tax benefits A & B, Health care card, Child Care Benefit, Centrepay, Saver Plus
- Relevant community organizations

## **CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP**

The school appreciates that families may sometimes experience financial difficulties in meeting requests for payments and contributions. Support for families experiencing hardship is available by contacting our Business Manager, Liz Jenkins on 9850 7122 or email [Bulleen.heights.sch@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:Bulleen.heights.sch@edumail.vic.gov.au) to arrange a confidential meeting to arrange support options.

Arrangements can be made to reduce the contributions by the following:

- Remove the full year's cost of excursion in favour of pay as you go
- Remove the optional items
- Arrange and implement an instalment plan for payment
- Provide information on other ways to pay the contributions:
  - Direct Debts
  - Camps, Sports & Excursions Fund
  - Centrepay
- Access to other support:
  - State School's Relief (SSR)
  - SSR - Clk2sell app
  - SSR - Foundation and Year 7 enrolments – Uniform subsidy
  - Family Tax Benefits, A or B, Health Care Card, Child Care Benefits
  - Youth Allowance, Newstart Allowance, Abstudy for 15-18 year olds

## **COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES**

- 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. Only the initial invitation for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice will be issued per year to parents and guardians.
- This policy is available on the school website and presentations on the implementation of the policy will be made at the Orientation Days.
- All records of payments or contributions and any outstanding payments by parents and guardians are kept confidential.
- Concerns regarding parent payments can be made through the office for general enquiries or by contacting the Principal or Business Manager to arrange a confidential discussion.

## **MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY**

- Bulleen Heights School will annually review parent payments requested to ensure they are in line with Department of Education and Training guidelines.

- The School Council Finance Committee will conduct an annual review of the implementation of the Parent Payment Policy including addressing any concerns raised by the school community and report to the School Council.
- Changes to the Policy Implementation will be communicated to the school community via the school Newsletter, Website and COMPASS.

**Date of approval by School Council: February 2020**