

POLICY – February 2024



PARENT PAYMENTS POLICY

Review: Annually

CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

Victorian government schools are child safe environments. Lilydale Heights College actively promote the safety and wellbeing of all students, and all school staff are committed to protecting students from abuse or harm in the school environment, in accordance with their legal obligations including child safe standards. All schools have a Child Safety Code of Conduct consistent with the Department's exemplar available at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/protect/Pages/childsafestandards.aspx>

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?

Summary

- Schools must provide students with free instruction and ensure students have free access to all items, activities and services that are used by the school to fulfil the requirements of the Curriculum.
- Schools may request parents make voluntary financial contributions towards the cost of schooling under 2 categories: Curriculum Contributions and Other Contributions.
- Schools may invite parents to purchase optional Extra-Curricular Items and Activities on a user-pays basis.
- Schools may invite parents to supply or purchase their own educational items for their child to use and to own.
- Schools must apply the [Financial Help for Families policy](#) when implementing the Parent Payments policy.
- Schools must follow the requirements on finance and communications set out in the [Guidance tab](#).

DETAILS

Free instruction

All students in Victorian government schools must have free access to instruction that is offered by a school to fulfil the requirements of the Victorian Curriculum F–10, Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) (Curriculum).

Free instruction includes the teaching staff, administration and the provision of facilities in connection with the instruction of the Curriculum, including reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities.

Schools must ensure that students have free access to items and activities as required for the school's delivery of the Curriculum. The extent and frequency of access that students require depends on the school's context and their approach to delivering the Curriculum.

Schools are not required to provide students with items to own, or keep, on a one-to-one basis. However, schools must determine appropriate resourcing to ensure students have access to the relevant items for the duration required to access the Curriculum.

Schools cannot refuse students instruction in the Curriculum or disadvantage students on the basis of financial contributions and payments not being made. Schools cannot deny students access to the Curriculum by withholding enrolment or advancement to the next year level on the basis.

PRINCIPLES OF VOLUNTARY FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Schools seeking a parent payment must adhere to the following principles of voluntary financial contributions:

- the school council should clearly explain how contributions will be spent when making a request for a contribution
- each contribution is to be voluntary and obtained without coercion or harassment
- a student at the school is not to be refused instruction in the Curriculum because their parents do not make a contribution
- a student is not to be approached, coerced or harassed for contributions
- any record of contributions is confidential, as is any decision by a parent not to make a financial contribution.

PARENT PAYMENT CATEGORIES

School councils may request parents to make voluntary financial contributions and payments to the school under the following categories.

Curriculum Contributions

Curriculum Contributions are voluntary financial contributions for curriculum items and activities which the school deems necessary for students to learn the Curriculum. As each school delivers the Curriculum based on their own local context, it is at a school's discretion to determine whether an item or activity is necessary for delivering the Curriculum.

Schools must be able to justify why an item or activity is necessary to the school's delivery of the Curriculum. Schools cannot refuse students instruction in the Curriculum or deny student access to items or activities on the basis of Curriculum Contributions not being made. Each student must have the same access to curriculum items or activities regardless of whether a student's parent has made a Curriculum Contribution.

Schools must provide a clear description of the item or activity when requesting Curriculum Contributions so that parents are informed of what their contributions are going towards. However, schools do not need to itemise each individual item when requesting Curriculum Contributions. Schools must use funds raised from Curriculum Contributions for the purposes of which they were requested.

Other Contributions

Other Contributions are voluntary financial contributions for non-curriculum items and activities that relate to the school's functions and objectives.

Schools cannot refuse students instruction in the Curriculum or disadvantage them in any way on the basis of Other Contributions not being made.

Other Contributions can be requested for a broad area of school need or a specific, clearly described purpose that relates to the school's functions and objectives. Schools must use funds raised from Other Contributions for the purposes of which they were requested.

Extra-Curricular Items and Activities

Extra-Curricular Items and Activities are items and activities that enhance or broaden the schooling experience of students and are additional to or outside what the school provides for free in order to deliver the Curriculum. As each school delivers the Curriculum based on their own local context, it is at a school's discretion to determine whether an item or activity is extra-curricular.

An item or activity can be provided on a user-pays basis and categorised in Extra-Curricular Items and Activities if it is not required for students to meet Curriculum outcomes or if there is a free standard activity available for students to participate in the Curriculum. Items or activities provided on a user-pays basis can still support curriculum-based learning; however, schools must be able to deliver the standard curriculum requirements to a student who does not participate.

Schools do not need to provide students with access to Extra-Curricular Items and Activities if payment is not received. However, schools cannot refuse students instruction in the Curriculum if payment is not received.

Extra-Curricular Items and Activities must be specific, clearly described and identified as optional.

Extra-Curricular Items and Activities can include:

- optional alternative forms of instruction
- optional non-curriculum-based school events (graduation)
- optional non-curriculum items (school magazines, yearbooks)
- optional excursions and camps
- optional sporting programs
- optional music programs
- optional out of school hours care
- optional items and materials that are linked to the Curriculum but are additional to or outside what the school provides for free to deliver the Curriculum.

Extra-Curricular Items and Activities must not include:

- items, activities, and services that are required to fulfil the Curriculum
- educational items such as headphones, stationery packs, digital devices, textbooks (including digital textbooks), calculators
- general enrolment fees
- subject enrolment fees (including VET courses and subjects defined by the school as 'elective')
- the hire, lease, or lease-to-own, of school owned digital devices.

Schools should ensure the cost of Extra-Curricular Items and Activities are kept to a minimum and made affordable for families. Schools must apply the [Financial Help for Families policy](#) in relation to Extra-Curricular Items and Activities to support families experiencing financial hardship.

Educational items for students to own

Schools can invite parents to bring from home, purchase, or lease educational items directly from third parties instead of using what is made available for free by the school. Educational items for students to own include items that have a specific curriculum purpose and for which students take individual possession. When inviting parents to purchase or lease educational items to own directly from a third-party provider, the school may include a list of recommended items or specifications.

Schools cannot communicate to families that parents must purchase educational items for students to own from third parties. If a parent does not provide or purchase educational items, the school must ensure that the student has free access to items as required for the school's delivery of the Curriculum. Schools are not required to provide students with items to own, or keep, on a one-to-one basis. However, schools must determine appropriate resourcing to ensure students have access to the relevant items for the duration required to access the Curriculum.

Educational items for students to own can include:

- textbooks (paper or digital versions)
- stationery
- calculators
- digital devices
- fitted safety equipment (safety boots, closed shoes).

Educational items for students to own must not include:

- items not directly related to curriculum-based learning
- classroom consumables (including class materials such as food ingredients or art supplies that contribute to finished products that students take home)
- items that students do not take individual possession of (for example, class sets of devices, sports equipment, whole-school subscriptions)
- items that are developed and produced by the school (for example, school-developed workbooks, school-developed exam papers)
- activities or services (for example, camps, excursions, events, device repair costs).

FINANCIAL HELP FOR FAMILIES

While all contributions are voluntary, schools must prepare for and support families experiencing financial hardship in order to facilitate student participation in the full school program (for example, purchasing Extra-Curricular Items and Activities and educational items for students to own).

Schools must:

- apply the Financial Help for Families policy to parent payment arrangements
- nominate a parent payment contact person(s) to support families with financial help arrangements and support programs.

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.
- Where an enrolment ceases beyond the first month of Term 1, refunds will be paid for the remaining whole term(s),

- e.g.
- if student ceases early March - refunds for Terms 2, 3, 4 are applicable
 - if student ceases May/June - refunds for Terms 3, 4 are applicable

less administration fee of 5% ratified by the College Finance Committee

Refer to [Financial Help for Families](#) for further information.

IMPLEMENTING THE POLICY IN SCHOOLS

Schools develop their parent payment arrangements to suit the contextual needs and aspirations of their school community while ensuring their arrangements remain in alignment with this policy.

School's parent payment arrangements must:

- support the functions and objectives of the school, including the enhancement of student learning, access, equity, inclusion and wellbeing
- ensure costs to parents are kept to a minimum, affordable for families, and proportionate to the needs of the school
- follow the finance requirements set out in the guidance
- follow the communication requirements set out in the guidance
- use the templates provided by the Department to create and communicate their parent payment arrangements
- follow all monitoring and compliance requirements as directed by the Department.

Schools must not:

- have parent payment arrangements that are inconsistent with the above requirements
- undertake debt recovery activities for any payments or contributions
- have a localised Parent Payments policy
- use terms, such as fees, charges or levies, that suggest or communicate that contributions are compulsory
- have parent payment arrangements that request payments for:
 - teacher professional learning
 - the provision of gifts, benefits or hospitality to school staff or school council members
 - items or activities that schools receive full funding for such as electricity, standard internet access and department provided administrative software
 - administrative costs such as merchant fees associated with electronic payment transactions, sending text messages or letters to parents.

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.

REFUNDS

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, 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. Where possible, we will make this clear to parents at the time of payment.

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](#)

Evaluation:

The College Program Charges Policy to be reviewed annually and endorsed by College Council.

This policy was last ratified by Finance Committee in....	February 2024
This policy was last ratified by School Council in....	February 2024

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?

Essential Student Learning Items



Schools can request payment for these 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.



school's policy for more information.

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

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

- student accident insurance

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

For more information on Parent Payments and Personal Devices, visit the DET website at: www.education.vic.gov.au

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e.g.

- Building or Library fund (Tax deductible)
- Voluntary contributions for a specific purpose, such as equipment, materials, services.
- General voluntary contributions