

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Fountain Gate Secondary College

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 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. 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.

¹ 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

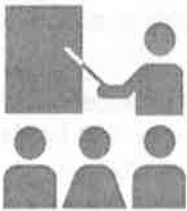
Schools

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 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

Schools can invite **Voluntary**



- e.g.
- Building or Library fund (Tax deductible)

Fountain Gate Secondary College

Parent Payment Policy

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

Fountain Gate Secondary College School Council will annually review parent payments requested to ensure they are in line with Department of Education & Training guidelines. Charges will be clearly itemized, costed and categorized as Essential Student Learning, Optional Items or Voluntary Financial Contributions.

Parent contribution requests will be made in line with the principles of Educational value; Access, equity and inclusion; Affordability; Engagement and Support; Respect and Confidentiality; Transparency and Accountability

Parent contributions will be requested to assist the school in providing an enhanced teaching and learning program for every student in line with the school priorities.

Implementation:

The Fountain Gate Secondary College will:

- Annually review the financial levies associated with Essential Education Items, Optional Extras and Voluntary Financial Contributions.
- Annually review the Year 9 & 10 elective levies and VCE Subject charges.
- Students are guaranteed access to the core curriculum program regardless of payments.
- Ensure that families are able to choose an elective program for their child at Year 9 & 10 that involve no additional costs.
- Confirm elective/subject choices for the following year in the first week of Term 4.
- Provide an opportunity for parents to review their child's Year 9 & 10 elective program, the VCE subject charges and associated costs and to give an approval and agreement to pay in writing.
- Parents will be notified early with request for payments and provided with a payment schedule.
- Provide parents who have difficulty paying for Essential Education Items, Electives and VCE subject charges access to a range of support options.
- Payment plans including bank and Centrepay transfers will only be considered where the family has made a written commitment. The verbal commitment to a payment plan is not sufficient in of itself.
- Any outstanding amounts from the previous year must be paid before paying the current year's charges.
- Families who do not adhere to their payment plan commitments will be deemed to be not fulfilling their financial obligations and their child may be excluded from co-curricular activities.
- The finance office will discuss payment plan options in a confidential manner with the families.
- Payments to secure a student's place in semester one & two electives/subject levies will be due as indicated by the payment schedule.
- Semester 2 elective/subject payments will be due by the second Friday in May.
- Where elective/subject levies are not received by the due date, the student may, at the principal's discretion be offered a no cost elective.
- Students can be excluded from co-curricular activities/initiatives that are optional for example; camps, formals, presentation ball, VCE commemorative jackets, graduation dinner, ski trip, excursions not required for fieldwork for the core curriculum where there is no payment for Essential Education Items, Elective and VCE Subject charges.
- If appropriate payment is not received according to the payment schedule, families will be provided with a copy of this policy, an invoice for the payments due and a letter outlining the various payment options. The letter will restate that their child's access to co-curricular activities will be restricted until the appropriate payments are made to the College.
- New enrolments to the school will have a period of 4 weeks to pay for their elective/subject choices.
- Students who have changed electives/subject choices will have a period of 2 weeks to pay for their elective/subject choices.
- Parents will be notified regarding payment obligations by, statements each term, SMS, telephone calls and newsletter articles.
- The College Principal may consider other payment arrangements after consideration of all factors including any history of the family's payments to the College.

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

Parents will be provided with early notification of annual payment requests (a minimum of 6 weeks prior to the commencement of the school year). Reasonable notice will be given for any other payment requests during the year (i.e. excursions).

Parents will be permitted to make payments in instalments, and be provided with several methods of making payment including, cash, cheque or direct deposit. Parents are able to enter into confidential payment arrangements by contacting the Finance Office on 8762 6839 and speaking to Lisa Wilson or Larissa Clark to arrange.

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

There are a number of support options available for parents including but not limited to;

- Second hand uniform if available
- Camps, Sports & Excursion Funding (CSEF) available to eligible parents
- State Schools Relief support available for uniforms/footwear (via the College Wellbeing Team)
- Local community supports (Wellbeing team can provide further information)

Information regarding support options is available from the general office and will be advertised periodically in the Newsletter and on the website.

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

The school understands that families may experience financial difficulties or hardship at times and may be unable to meet full or part payments requested. Families are invited to contact the Finance Team to make payment arrangements or alternatively can contact Business Manager for a confidential discussion and information regarding support options.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

The Parent Payment Policy and Implementation will be published on the school website.

General enquiries regarding parent charges may be made to the Finance office on 8762 6839.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

The School Council (via the Finance Committee) will conduct an annual review of the implementation of the Parent Payment Policy including addressing any concerns raised by the school community. Any changes to the Policy Implementation will be reported back to the community via notice on the schools website and report in the schools Newsletter.

Date Ratified March 2016
For Review 2017

Pete Hanratty
Principal
School Council endorsed this policy March 2017.
Due for review March 2018.

Angelo Herft
School Council President