PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

**Waratah SDS**

# 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[[1]](#footnote-1) 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.”**](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/spag/management/PP_Costsupportforfamilies.docx)

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.**](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/pages/parentpayments.aspx)

Answers to the most commonly asked questions about school costs for parents see:   
[**Frequently Asked Questions – For Parents**](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/spag/management/PP_FAQforparents.docx)



**Waratah Special Developmental School**

Parent Payment Policy

# Parent Payment Charges

The Waratah SDS parent payment policy ensures that:

* costs are kept to a minimum
* payment requests are clearly itemised under the three parent payment categories
* items that students consume or take possession of are accurately costed
* no student will be treated differently, denied access or refused instruction to the standard curriculum program for not making a payment or voluntary contribution

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

These items include:

* materials that the student takes possession of, including books and student stationery – **the school does not charge a fee for books and stationery**.
* materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished articles. **The school charges $2 per week for the Homecrafts program which provides valuable opportunities for students to learn about healthy diets, develop independence skills and practice communication and social skills.**
* transport and entrance for camps and excursions which all students are expected to attend. **Excursions provide valuable opportunities for students to develop independence, social skills and communication skills in a real life situation. The school only charges for the actual cost of entry to the venue and a small fee for transport.**

**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:

* extra-curricular programs or activities e.g**. RDA ($745 per year), swimming ($90 per term)**
* school-based performances, productions and events
* class photographs.
* school uniform

**Voluntary financial contributions** are for those items and services that parents or guardians are invited to make a donation to the school, for example for grounds maintenance, bus running expenses.

The link to the Department of Education’s Parent Payment policy can be found here:

[Parent Payments: Policy | education.vic.gov.au](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/parent-payment/policy)

# 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 via a term account.
* Costs will be kept to a minimum with payment requests/letters fair and reasonable. Parents can either pay the term account in a lump sum or negotiate other arrangements with the school office.
* Payment requests to parents will be itemised and the category each items falls under will be clearly identified as an essential education item, optional education item or voluntary financial contribution.
* Receipts will be issued to parents immediately upon making payment.
* Reminders for unpaid essential education items or optional extras will be generated and distributed with term accounts.
* All records of payments or contributions and any outstanding payments by parents and guardians are kept confidential.

# Family support options

The school appreciates that families may sometimes experience financial difficulties in meeting requests for payments and contributions. A range of support options are available to assist eligible parents and the welfare officer assists parents with accessing these.

* State Schools relief can assist with uniforms and clothing
* The Camps, Sport and Excursion Fund (CSEF) can be accessed by parents with a Health Care Card
* Philanthropic organisations can also be approach for individuals or groups of students

# Consideration of hardship

Parents experiencing hardship can approach the Business Manager Mandy Bligh to discuss payment options. Parents can also approach Maria Nespeca the Welfare Officer to discuss financial support options. Parents can approach Mandy or Maria by phone on 9474 8700 or by coming into the school and discussing in person.

# Communication with families

The school will communicate this policy with parents by sending it out with the school newsletter in November each year. The policy will also be uploaded onto the school website.

Any parents who have concerns about the policy or want to make a general inquiry can contact the Principal Jenny Wallace directly on 9474 8700.

# Monitoring and review of the implementation of the policy

The school council will review the policy in term 4 each year in preparation for the following year. The school council will consider how the policy was communicated to parents and any concerns that have been raised.

**Date of approval by School Council 27th February 2020**

**Date reviewed: 12th July 2022**

**Next review: July 2024**

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. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)