

# PARENT PAYMENT

This policy was last ratified by School Council in 2018

## **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/guardians under three categories only: Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions.

### *Essential Education Items*

Essential Education 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. These items include:

- Materials that the student takes possession of, including text books and student stationery
- Materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished articles (e.g. art, cooking, ICT).

### *Optional Extras*

Optional Extras 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. These items include:

- Student computer printing for personal use
- All camps, excursions and incursions
- Extra-curricular programs or activities e.g. instrumental music, school-based performances, productions and events
- School magazines, class photographs.

### *Voluntary Financial Contributions*

Voluntary Financial Contributions are for those items and services that parents or guardians 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.

### **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.
- Those families experiencing difficulty with the payment of school-level parent payments are encouraged to meet or talk over the telephone with the Principal or Student Welfare Coordinator to confidentially discuss alternative payment methods.
- This policy is available on the school's website for parents to view.
- Staff will be informed of the policy at the beginning of each year.
- Parents are able to make general inquires about charges, raise any issues relating to this policy with the Business Manager or Principal at the office.

### **Support for Families**

Families may experience financial difficulties and may be unable to meet the full or part payments requested. There are a range of support options available to support and assist parents e.g. second hand uniforms, donated uniforms, Camps, Sport and Excursions Fund, State Schools' Relief and local community groups.

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.

Hardship arrangements include a proactive approach to providing support for parents experiencing financial difficulty. Discretion and care are used in approaching families who may need support.

### **Implementation:**

- Albion Primary School shall notify all parents of the school-level parent payments and the date for payment as early as possible but no less than two weeks before the due date for payment.
- Payment is preferred to be made by one lump sum payment, however, alternative arrangements can be made to make instalments.
- Payments may be made by cash or Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT). Parents are requested to let school know if an EFT payment has been made.
- The status and details of any payments by parents or guardians of students is confidential.
- Those families experiencing difficulty with the payment of school-level parent payments are encouraged to meet or talk over the telephone with the Principal or Student Welfare Coordinator to confidentially discuss alternative payment methods.
- This policy is available on the school's website for parents to view.
- Parents are able to make general inquires about charges, raise any issues relating to this policy with the Business Manager or Principal at the office.

### **Refunds:**

Payments made to school are banked efficiently and the school does not hold cash on the premises so to refund cash payment is often not possible. Albion Primary School will consider requests for partial or full refunds of payments made by parents/guardians 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. Where funds paid to the school by parents/guardians have not been made to a third party, that payment can be allocated to a future school event that the child will participate in.

### **Evaluation:**

This policy is to be reviewed annually.