



## PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

### Purpose

To ensure that parent payment practices are consistent, transparent and ensure that all students at Melba College 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.

### Definitions

- **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.
- **Essential Student Learning Items** - 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** - 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.

### 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. Melba College Council is responsible for

developing and approving school-level parent payment charges and can request payments from parents under three categories only:-

- **Essential Student Learning Items**
- **Optional Items**
- **Voluntary Financial Contributions.**

### **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.

### **Principles**

In implementing this policy, Melba College will adhere to the following 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 Melba College Council considers the proposed requests for parent payments the cost is kept to a minimum and is affordable to most families at the school.

The Melba College Principal and College Council 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.
- students are not denied access to the standard curriculum program, refused instruction or disadvantaged on the basis of payments not being made for education items or services
- that where a child cannot participate in an essential activity or provide an essential student learning item, the school considers the financial hardship circumstances of the student or makes alternative arrangements that provides for the required knowledge and skills to be learned - this is to ensure all students learn the required content necessary to meet the achievement standards in the standard curriculum program
- costs to parents are kept to a minimum and are affordable for most families
- the school council is aware of and understands the views of the school community in determining parent payments
- the school has a nominated parent payment contact person
- the school does not withhold access to enrolment or advancement to the next year level as a condition of payment for any of the three categories
- items students consume or take possession of are accurately costed
- payment requests for goods, services and other items provided by the school to students 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 (note: this does not include activities set by the school)
- parents are advised of the availability of alternative payment options for families who may be experiencing financial hardship and are invited to contact the principal or nominated parent payment person to discuss these arrangements
- schools must ensure information on payment options is available, accessible and easily understood by parents, ensuring parents know what to expect and what supports they can access
- the status and details of any financial arrangements are kept confidential and only shared with relevant school personnel
- payment may be requested but not required prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used

- parents are provided with early notice of annual payment requests for school fees, that is, a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous school year. This enables parents to plan and budget accordingly
- schools must provide reasonable notice for any other payment requests that arise during the school year, ensuring that parents have a clear understanding of the full financial contribution being sought
- parents experiencing hardship are not pursued for outstanding school payments from one year to the next
- the use of debt collectors of any type to obtain any outstanding funds owed to Melba College from parents is not permitted
- Initial payment requests and letters to parents for student materials and services charges must be accompanied by the following information:
  - a description of each of the three parent payment categories
  - the materials and activities that parents are being asked to pay for
  - that parents are expected to provide Essential Student Learning Items for their children, and have the option of purchasing these through the school or to purchase them independently, where appropriate
  - the availability of alternative payment options and an invitation to contact the principal or nominated parent payment contact person, if the parent wishes to discuss the payments further
  - a copy of or link to the Parent Payment Policy
- administrative and financial processes are compliant with Departmental requirements such as CASES21 financial reporting and that:
  - prior to generating reminder notices to parents for unpaid items, discretion should be exercised with families where there may be hardship or financial difficulty
  - invoices/statements for unpaid essential student learning items or optional items accepted by parents can be generated and distributed according to parent payment arrangements, but no more than monthly
  - only the initial invitation for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice per year is sent to all parents
  - receipts are issued to parents immediately upon payment and receipted on CASES21
  - all documents relating to individual parent payments are stored confidentially in a secure location and accessible only to the principal, business manager and other nominated staff ensuring identifiable parent information is kept confidential.

## **SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES**

Families may experience financial difficulties and may be unable to meet the full or part payments requested. The Melba College Principal and College Council will 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 the Melba College Business Manager or 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**

### **RELATED POLICIES AND RESOURCES**

- [Cost Support for Families \(docx - 75.91kb\)](#)
- [Parent Payments - School Checklist \(docx - 44.25kb\)](#)
- [Parent Payment Policy and Implementation Template \(docx - 1.25mb\)](#)
- [Supporting Families Experiencing Hardship: questions and answers \(for school staff\)](#)
- [Support Materials for School Use \(docx - 99.29kb\)](#) - includes sample letters and information sheet
- [Transparency Framework for Schools \(docx - 88.27kb\)](#)
- [Understanding Parent Payment Categories \(pdf - 285.74kb\)](#) - one page information sheet
- [Sample Low Income Awareness Checklist for Schools](#) (Good Shepherd)
- [Social Inclusion at School - How to help low-income families \(pdf - 550.49kb\)](#)

### **EVALUATION**

<b>Policy Reviewed by School Council</b>	<b>Person Responsible for Policy</b>	<b>Next School Council Review</b>
2020	Assistant Principal - Accountabilities	2023

# 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 school's policy for more information.

For more information on Parent Payments and Personal Devices, visit the DET website at: [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)

Schools can invite **Voluntary Financial Contributions** for



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