

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

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

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.

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.”](#)

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](#)

Forest Hill College

Parent Payment Policy

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

School Council is able to request payments or contributions for education items and services from parents and guardians of students enrolled at the College.

School Council is responsible for developing and approving school-level Parent Payment Charges and can request payments from parents under the following three categories:

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 College considers essential for all students and of which students take possession. Parents may choose to provide the items themselves or buy the items from the College 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 and guardians can be invited to make a donation to the school for a general or specific purpose, eg College 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.

The College designs and develops its learning and teaching programs drawing on the best educational knowledge and practices and strives to offer broad and enriching opportunities to students that are above and beyond what is required in the standard curriculum.

The payment of Parent Payment Charges is highly valued by the College. The commitment from parents to make payment of the charges benefits students and results in improved achievement outcomes, wellbeing and engagement in learning.

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

- Parents and guardians will be provided with early notice of annual payment requests for College charges, being at least a minimum of six weeks’ notice prior to the end of the previous school year.
- Receipts will be issued to parents for payments received by the College.
- Parents and guardians will be provided with reasonable notice (with best practice being no less than two weeks’ notice) of any other payment requests that arise during the school year.
- Parents and guardians will be requested to make payment of Essential Student Learning Items by the end of week one of Term 1 of the school year. Where this cannot occur, the payment of

charges via a repayment agreement over an agreed period within the school year will be encouraged.

- The payment for charges associated with Optional Items will be required in accordance with the payment schedules specified in documentation issued in support of the relevant Optional Item.
- Parents and guardians will be invoiced pro-rata reduced Parent Payment Charges for students who commence as new students of the College during Terms 2-4 of the school year, where appropriate.
- The following payment method options will be available:
 - Compass parent portal
 - BPAY
 - Cash, cheque, EFTPOS
- Family Statements will be issued to families at least once per term. Details of Parent Payment Charges for a school year will be available for review on the Compass portal. Family Statements will not be issued more than monthly. Family Statements may be emailed or mailed, as specified by families.
- There will be only one reminder notice issued to parents each school year for voluntary financial contributions.
- The status of any financial arrangements will be maintained on a confidential basis and only disclosed to relevant College personnel.

REFUNDS

The College 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, the College will not be able to provide a refund for items or services purchased, or committed for purchase 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.

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

The College understands that families may sometimes experience financial difficulty in meeting requests for payments and contributions and has a range of different support options to assist with the costs of education:

- Flexible payment arrangements will be considered upon request for the payment of Essential Student Learning Items and, where it can be accommodated, Optional Items.
- Second hand and low cost options, eg second hand book sale
- CSEF – to eligible applicants
- State Schools Relief
- Local community support on occasion

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

The College will provide support to families experiencing hardship by:

- Arranging a discussion and/or meeting with either of the following parties, to discuss their circumstances and make appropriate arrangements:
 - a head of the relevant sub school
 - a member of the Principal Team
 - the Business Manager
- The Accounts Receivable Officer, Maddison Russell, is the first point of contact for families wishing to discuss the status of their charges. She can be contacted on 9814 9444 or via m.russell@fhc.vic.edu.au. In the instance the concern is unable to be resolved with Ms Russell, the matter will be referred to the Business Manager.
- Parents/guardians experiencing hardship will not be pursued for outstanding school fees from one year to the next.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

- The policy will be communicated with the College community via the College website, with the following documents being placed on the website for reference:
 - A copy of this policy
 - Understanding Parent Payment Categories Template
 - Frequently Asked Questions – For Parents Reference Guide
- The documents will be referenced to families on an annual basis, ahead of the new school year commencing.
- Hard copies of the documents will be available upon request from the General Office.
- Families may make general enquiries about charges, raise any issue or complaint by contacting the Accounts Receivable Officer referred to above.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

The College adheres to the Parent Payment Policy set by the Department of Education and Training.

Where there is inconsistency between the implementation of this policy and the Department's policy, the Department's policy will prevail.

The College will monitor the effectiveness and impact of the implementation of this policy on an annual basis.

Date of approval by School Council –11 September 2019