

# PARENT PAYMENT POLICY & IMPLEMENTATION



## POLICY STATEMENT

The purpose of this policy is 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 student 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.

## IMPLEMENTATION:

### **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. Free instruction is the teaching staff, administration and the provision of facilities in connection with the instruction of the standard curriculum program. School councils are responsible for approving school-level parent payment charges. School Councils are able to request payments or contributions for education items and services from parents and guardians for students in Victorian government schools in the three categories:

- essential education items
- optional education items
- 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 buy **all** of the items from the school (*as book packs cannot be split or single items provided*) or provide **all** of the items themselves.

Pascoe Vale North Primary School spends considerable time selecting the most appropriate requisites to meet the needs of our students. Our student requisites contain high quality materials sourced at a competitive price due to our ability to bulk order. ***If parents choose to provide the materials, the items should be of an equivalent standard and meet the specifications provided by the school.***

**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.

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 and sensitivity.
- **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).
- 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 the principal exercises sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of students and their families when considering parent payment fees. 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.

### **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**

### **Parent Payment Charges**

**Essential Education items** are those items or services that are essential to support the course of instruction in the standard curriculum program that parents and guardians are responsible for and may choose to either provide or pay the school to provide.

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. science, design & technology, art subjects, etc );

- School uniform;
- Transport and entrance for camps and excursions which all students are expected to attend.

**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 are required to pay for them.

These items include:

- extra-curricular programs or activities e.g. instrumental music
- school-based performances, productions and events;
- class photographs

**Voluntary Financial Contributions** are for those items and services that parents and guardians are **invited** to make a donation to the school, for example for Grounds Maintenance, or General School Contribution.

### **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 (e.g. a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous school year).*

*Costs will be kept to a minimum with payment requests/letters fair and reasonable. To further assist parents with payments, a payment plan will be available:*

- *Option A          Payment in Full*
- *Option B          Payment by Installment*
- *Option C          Other payment arrangements as approved by the Principal*

*All payments will be receipted.*

*Methods of payment include:*

- *Cash*
- *Cheque*
- *Qkr*

### **Consideration of hardship**

*Pascoe Vale North Primary School will provide support to parents experiencing hardship, including:*

- *Support and special payment arrangements can be discretely organized on a case by case basis*
- *Contact can be made directly to the Principal or Assistant Principal about financial situations and related difficulties in making payments by:*
  - *Telephone:      9354 3343*
  - *In person:      General Office in Kent Road Pascoe Vale*

### **Communication with families**

- *The school's implementation of this policy will be communicated with the school community via letter/newsletter and the school website.*
- *Any issues or general inquiries about charges can be referred to the Principal or Assistant Principal via:*
  - *Telephone:      9354 3343*
  - *In person:      General Office in Kent Road Pascoe Vale*

### **EVALUATION:**

#### **Monitoring and review of the implementation of the policy**

- *School council is responsible for monitoring the implementation, effectiveness and impact of this policy, taking into account, the transparency of processes and engagement with parents. It will be reviewed annually.*

This policy was ratified by School Council in September 2016

Name of School Council President: Nicholas Bliss