

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

School Name: Athol Road Primary School

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

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.

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.

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](#)

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

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

School Name: Athol Road Primary School

Parent Payment Policy

Schools work in close partnership with parents and the broader school community to provide the best education opportunities and outcomes for students both inside and outside the learning spaces. Through this partnership parents understand that the contribution they make to their children's education, in all its various forms, plays an important role in enriching the school's learning and teaching program and improving educational outcomes. The commitment from parents to contribute benefits students and results in improving achievement outcomes, wellbeing and engagement in learning. This is why parent contribution is highly valued by school communities.

Athol Road Primary School designs and develops its learning and teaching programs by drawing on the best educational knowledge and practices and strives to offer broad, enriched student opportunities that are above and beyond what is required in the standard curriculum. These programs vary from year to year to reflect the priorities, decisions and needs of our school and this, in turn, informs the fees set by School Council.

Each year School Council considers submissions consistent with and governed by the *Education and Teaching Reform Act 2006* (the Act) 'Parent Payment Policy'. In so doing School Council will ensure that the following elements will be included in the every School Fee notice.

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

Athol Road Primary School provides a comprehensive, creative and challenging educational program for all of our students in a supportive, caring environment. A clear specification of the items able to be charged for, including descriptions and an outline of costs within the three payment categories has been provided to all families along with their booklist.

The school is heavily reliant on the Voluntary Financial contributions it receives, to provide exciting learning opportunities and a safe working environment for all members of our Athol Road Primary School community. These contributions allow the school to provide facilities and programs that are not otherwise provided for through the Student Resource Package. Without these contributions, many resources that benefit your child may not be able to be offered at Athol Road Primary School, including items such as maintenance and replacement of learning space fixtures, fittings and furniture as well as minor works, improvements and maintenance of our school grounds and buildings.

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

The school accepts payment by cash, cheque or credit card at the office. For more expensive items such as fees or camp, a payment plan or instalments are an option.

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

There are various options to assist families who are suffering financial hardship, some of which are listed below for your information.

- Second hand uniform items are available at the office at very reasonable prices
- CSEF is available to families who hold a Health Care Card or are on a Centrelink pension. More information is available at the office.
- State Schools Relief is an organization associated with schools. It can supply school uniform and shoes to eligible students on a referral from the principal. More information is available at the office.
- Local community organizations support is sometimes available to help families suffering financial hardship. The school can source these on request.
- Centrelink offers a service whereby small payments can be directed to the school on a regular basis – this can significantly reduce hardship
- Parents who have difficulty paying for essential items are to be directed to a range of support options including: Scheduled Payment Schemes, etc.

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

- Parents/Guardians experiencing financial hardship should make contact with Mrs Ruby Toombs (Principal) or Mrs Emma Pearse (Business Manager) who are the parent payment contacts. They can be contacted by phone on 9547 1224, email at athol.road.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au or in person about their financial situation and related difficulties to discuss the options and arrangements available to them.
- Access to enrolment or advancement to the next year level will not be withheld as a condition of payment
- The school will ensure that the status and details of any payments or non-payments by parents/guardians are confidential
- Students will not be treated differently, denied access to the standard curriculum program or refused instruction on the basis of payments not being made for education items, services or voluntary financial contributions
- All students will have access to the standard curriculum program
- Alternative arrangements will be made for students whose parents choose that their children will not be participating in camps
- Collectors of any type, including debt collectors will not be used by the school to obtain monies from parents/guardians
- The school understands that it can be embarrassing to discuss hardship and ensures parents/guardians that each situation will be treated with the utmost confidence. The school may discreetly approach families which are believed could need support and special payment arrangements to be made

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

- This policy, together with DET policy and FAQs will be published on the school website: atholroadps.vic.edu.au
- The school will provide parents/guardians with early notice of requests for payment of Essential Education Items, Optional Extras and Voluntary Financial Contributions ie. a minimum of 6 weeks' notice where possible
- Parents may be requested, but not required, to pay these prior to commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used. School Council can request payments from parents in the following categories
 - **Essential Student Learning Items:** These are items which parents/guardians pay the school to provide (or purchase equivalent Essential Student Learning Items themselves, in consultation with the school, if appropriate). These are items, activities or services that are essential to support student learning of the standard curriculum and the school considers essential for all students and includes: stationery items specific to each year level. These include text books, workbooks and student stationery that the individual student takes possession of
 - **Optional Items:** These are 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 and, if parents choose to access them for students, they will be required to pay for them. These include camps, fees for extra curricular activities and programs
 - **Voluntary Financial Contributions:** Parents are invited to make a donation to the school for the specific purpose of maintaining a safe, healthy and vibrant school environment. eg. school grounds projects or new playground equipment. The school will ask for these voluntary financial contributions once initially and will only issue one reminder during the year. A family statement can be sent out every month
- Parents/guardians are able to raise any issues or make general inquiries about charges by contacting either Mrs Ruby Toombs (Principal) or Mrs Emma Pearse (Business Manager) by phone, email or in person

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

- School Council will continue to monitor the implementation of this policy, identify the factors/measures to be taken into account, such as transparency of processes and engagement with parents, how/when it will be reported back to the school community and timing and processes of review.

For more information please see the Department's FAQ page at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/financial/Pages/parentpaymentfaqs.aspx>

Date of approval by School Council

March 2019