

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY



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.

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. School councils are 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 and Voluntary Financial Contributions.

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.

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **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. 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:

School Council will consider the proposed requests for parent payments the cost is kept to a minimum and is affordable to most parents at the school.

The Principal will 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. Tallarook Primary School will exercise sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of students and our families when considering parent payment fees. There are a range of support options available to support and assist parents.

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 parents are provided the name and contact details of a nominated parent payment contact person (the Principal) at the school who they can discuss payment arrangements with.

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES:

Essential Student Learning Items: In accordance with the “Parent Payments in Victorian Government Schools” directives, our Essential Student Learning Items charge covers items which are essential for your child’s schooling.

Optional Items: Are offered on a user-pays basis and parents and guardians may choose whether their child accesses or participates in (e.g. extra-curricular programs or activities such as school based performances, productions or events, etc)

Voluntary Financial Contributions: Parents and guardians may be invited to make contributions to support the ongoing effective running and development of the school. Please note that donations to the Building Fund and the Library Fund are **tax deductible** under the education and charities banner. This is an excellent opportunity for parents to contribute to the improvement of the school library and / or buildings and take advantage of the tax benefits donations to these funds offer.

At Tallarook Primary School, we take pride in offering quality learning programs in a safe and stimulating environment. Understandably, the provision of both of these requires a large amount of time, equipment, materials and expertise. We are a non-profit organisation. All of the monies received and/or raised by the school are used to finance learning programs and to maintain and develop our school’s buildings and grounds. The difference between funds provided by the Department of Education and Training through our School Global Budget and those required for this school to operate to the high standard that we expect, leaves a shortfall which our School Council attempts to raise through fundraising and School Council Voluntary Contributions. This money is used to resource the teaching and learning programs we offer, the extra-curricular opportunities made available and to ensure the continued development of the schools facilities.

A letter will be sent to each family no less than SIX weeks prior to the end of the year outlining all charges per student, including payment options.

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS:

Second hand and low cost options e.g. school second hand uniforms / CSEF / State Schools Relief / Local community supports.

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP:

The school will provide support to parents experiencing hardship, by:

- Parents arranging an appointment with the Principal, via phone or in person regarding their financial situation and related difficulties in making payments.
- Linking families with local support services where appropriate.
- Identifying and approaching families who are known or suspected to be experiencing hardship.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES:

The policy will be communicated with the school community via the school's website and on Class Dojo.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY:

It is the responsibility of the school council to monitor the implementation and review of this policy.

DATE RATIFIED: TERM 4 2018

DATE FOR REVIEW: Term 4 2019