

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

PURPOSE

This policy provides information regarding parent payments to Bendigo South East College (BSE), and ensures that parent payment practices are consistent, transparent and ensure that all children have access to the standard curriculum.

The policy covers payments for essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions, and the parameters, terms and conditions within which these requests may be made.

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.

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.

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.

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

This policy ensures proposed requests for parent payments cost is kept to a minimum and is affordable to most parents at the school. The Principal 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.

Parents who have difficulty paying for Essential Student Learning Items may have access to a range of support options including:

- Welfare and support agencies that provide further assistance to students and their families: Anglicare, Department of Health and Human Services grants
- The College exercises sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of individual students and their families. The College’s Welfare Support Team coordinates alternative payment strategies for Essential Student Learning Items on a case-by-case basis. Payment plans can +be arranged.
- Alternative purchase of quality second-hand books and calculators on designated selling days.

BSE 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.

VOLUNTARY FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

BSEC invites parents and guardians of students enrolled at the College, or anyone else, to make a donation in the form of a Voluntary Financial Contribution to the College. Voluntary Financial Contributions are invited for the following purposes:

- contributions to the College’s Library or Building funds - these funds are approved by the Australian Taxation Office and donations are tax deductible.
- contributions for a specific purpose identified by the College and
- general Voluntary Financial Contributions or donations to the College.

SUPPORT OPTIONS

Parents who have difficulty paying for essential items may have access to a range of support options including:

- State Schools Relief.
- Welfare and support agencies that provide further assistance to students and their families e.g. Anglicare Department of Health and Human Services.
- The College exercises sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of individual students and their families. The College's Welfare Support Team coordinates alternative payment strategies for essential education items on a case-by-case basis. Payment plans can be arranged.

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND NON-PAYMENT

This policy ensures that:

1. Students are not 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.
2. All students have access to the standard curriculum program.
3. Administrative and financial processes are compliant with Departmental requirements such as CASES 21 Financial Reporting.
4. Receipts are issued to parents immediately upon payment.
5. Only the initial invitation for Voluntary Financial Contributions is sent to all parents and guardians.
6. Under no circumstances can collectors of any type, including debt collectors, be used by Colleges to obtain any funds from parents and guardians.

REFUNDS

This policy provides for the refund of charges that have been paid by parents/guardians or students, for activities in the following circumstances:

- an excursion/incursion has been cancelled,
- the cost of an activity was over-estimated,
- a subject change has resulted in a lower charge,
- there has been an overpayment and,
- where there has been a duplicated payment.

Exit Students

Where a student exits the College, relevant teachers will determine the proportional usage of materials, consumables, or resources used, to form the basis of a refund.

Refund Payments

Refunds are paid to the parent/guardian by cheque on the completion of a *Refund Form* – available from the Finance Office.



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 CYCLE

This policy was last updated on 23rd July, 2019 and is scheduled for review in July 2020.

Approved by School Council: Date: 29.07.19

See Appendix 1 – DET Understanding Parent Payment categories (U:\Policies\2019)

See Appendix 2 – DET Cost Support for Families (U:\Policies\2019)

