

# PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

## Tallangatta Secondary College

### 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 parents<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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](#)

# 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
  - campus, 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](http://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

## **PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES**

School councils are responsible for developing and approving school-level parent payment charges and can request payments / contributions from parents / guardians 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. Examples are text books, stationary, articles produced or consumed in technology, textiles, home economics, internet and printing for classroom purpose, transport and entrance for camps and excursions students are expected to attend.

**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. Examples are fees for extra-curricular programs such as instrumental music, guest speakers, school based performances, productions and events, optional camps and excursions and items students purchase such as school magazine and class photographs.

### **Voluntary Financial Contributions**

Parents can be invited to make a donation to the school for a general or specific purpose, e.g. Building Trust\*, Library Trust\*, Grounds Beautification (shade sails) and School Assistance Fund. \* Voluntary Financial Contributions are tax-deductible.

It is common for some secondary school subjects to levy for materials used or kept by students (eg. Home Economics). Where possible such costs are incorporated into fees and levies charged at the beginning of the year (note that this may make fees for certain subjects higher – Council wishes to ensure that such legitimate extra costs are known in advance by parents).

Where families are not able to pay fees (or where they choose not to do so) this information is not to be used to repeatedly remind families to make payments. Staff must ensure that students have access to core programs and materials offered within the College - students may not be prevented from participating in the College's core curriculum due to the non-payment of fees. The exception to this is optional educational activities and materials such as most camps, excursions and technology models that students may take from the school. If needed, staff will structure learning programs so as to not disadvantage students who do not pay fees or the costs of optional programs.

## **PAYMENT SUPPORT OPTIONS**

### State Schools Relief Committee

The College appreciates that families may sometimes experience financial difficulties in meeting requests for payments and contributions. A range of support options are available to assist eligible parents, including access to State Schools Relief Committee support via the Director of Student Services which can assist with clothing / uniforms.

### Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund (CSEF)

Schools are required to use the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund (CSEF) payment for expenses relating to camps, sport and / or excursions for the benefit of the eligible student. Some common examples of school-organised programs for which the CSEF payment may be used include; school camps, swimming and other school-organised sporting programs, outdoor education programs and excursion / incursions.

Parents and guardians, who hold a valid means-tested concession card or are a temporary foster parent, may be eligible for CSEF. This allowance is paid to the school to use towards expenses relating to camps, excursions or sporting activities for the benefit of your children. The total CSEF amount per student will be allocated in consultation with parents/carers.

## **PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

Payment of fees may be made to the school once booklists have been provided to parents and students have chosen their preferred course of study but may not be required from parents prior to the start of the new school year.

Parents and guardians will be provided with early notice of payment requests for essential items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions (e.g. a minimum of six weeks notice prior to the end of the previous school year).

To assist parents with payments, four payment options have been developed:

Option A Full amount at the beginning of Term 1

Option B Payment at the beginning of each Term

Option C Monthly payment on the first of each month

Option D Alternative payment arrangements agreed to by the College (Parents are encouraged to make an appointment with the College (Principal and / or Business Manager) to discuss circumstances and available options).

Payments may be requested but not required prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used.

Payment requests to parents will be itemised and the category each item falls under will be clearly identified as an essential education item, optional education item or voluntary financial contribution.

Receipts will be issued to parents immediately upon making payment.

Reminders for unpaid essential items or optional extra items will be generated and distributed on a regular basis to parents, but not more than once per month.

Only the initial invitation for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice will be issued per year to parents and guardians.

All records of payments or contributions and any outstanding payments by parents and guardians are kept confidential.

## **Distance Education**

The college will allow students' normal use of school facilities in cases where they are enrolled in distance education programs – school phones systems, copiers, computers etc. However, where charges apply from the Distance Education School the families of students concerned will be expected to pay those costs since the College does not receive funding for students enrolled therein.

## **TAFE**

Where students elect to undertake vocational studies through TAFE and the college incurs costs associated with the organisation and administration of their enrolment therein the college will be entitled to impose a charge to offset those costs.

## **Bus Travel**

Bus travel is allocated based on entitlement and seating capacity. Bus guidelines outline requirements for fare paying travellers. All students travelling on a fare paying basis are required to pay in advance of travel or via alternative payment options.

## **Second – hand bookstall**

In order to support parents in meeting the costs of their children's education the school operates a second- hand bookstall.

### **CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP**

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 experiencing hardship should contact the principal and / or the business manager to discuss payment arrangements.

### **COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES**

The Parent Payments policy will be published on the school website as downloadable copies and a printed copy can be made available through the General Office.

### **MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY**

Tallangatta Secondary College 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.

**Date of approval by School Council**

**(November 2016)**