



FOOTSCRAY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Parent Payment Policy



Purpose

To ensure that parent payment practices are consistent, transparent and ensure that all children have access to the standard curriculum and receive the best resources possible for the education of all students. 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 following three categories:

- Essential education items
- Optional education items
- Voluntary financial contributions

All administrative and financial processes are compliant with Department of Education Training (DET) requirements, including CASE21 financial reporting.

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.

At Footscray Primary School, we have high expectations for all our students. We value academic excellence across all areas of the curriculum. We aim to provide exemplary, engaging programs, so that all students can reach their full potential, in a safe and supportive environment.

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:

1. **Essential Education Items** – items or services that are essential to support the course of instruction in the standard curriculum program that parents or guardians are requested to pay the school to provide or may provide themselves, if appropriate. 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.

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.

2. **Optional Education Items** – are those that are provided in addition to or support 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 will be required to pay for them. These items include:
 - extra-curricular programs or activities e.g. instrumental music, dance classes
 - school-based performances, productions and events
 - school based activities (camps excursions, incursions)
3. **Voluntary Financial Contributions** – are for those items and services that parents or guardians are invited to make a donation to the school, for example for grounds maintenance, a library or building trust. Only some Voluntary Financial Contributions are tax-deductible. The attached diagram 'Understanding Parent Payment Categories' provides examples of items and materials under each category.

Principles

In implementing this policy, schools must adhere to the following 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 support is 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.

The School 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
- receipts will be issued to parents upon making payment
- 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 (in Term Four of the previous 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
- 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 will be generated and distributed on a regular basis, but not more than once a month.

Support for families

The school appreciates that 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 including the Schoolkids Bonus, State School Relief Committee and All Aboard.

Parents who have difficulty paying for essential items may make payments in affordable instalments. Families are welcome to discuss a confidential payment plan with the school Business Manager or the Principal if parents are unable to meet the cost of an item.

Second hand uniform shop

In order to support parents in meeting the costs of their children's education the school operates a second-hand school uniform shop (subject to parent volunteers).

Implementation

This policy ensures that:

- Costs are kept to a minimum
- Payment requests are clearly itemised under three payment categories
- Items that students consume or take possession of are accurately costed
- No student will be treated differently, denied access or refused instruction to the standard curriculum program for not making a payment or voluntary contribution
- Access to enrolment or advancement to the next level will not be withheld as a condition of payment for any of the three categories

Footscray Primary School spends considerable time selecting the most appropriate items and services to meet the needs of students. If parents and guardians choose to provide equivalent materials, this should be done in consultation with the school, as items should meet specifications, quality and of equivalent material provided by the school. There may also be certain items that due to their nature may only be provided by the school.

School-level processes and procedures

Communication with Families

All communication with parents/guardians, including payment requests, are to be fair and reasonable. Payment requests, letters or CASES 21 or COMPASS invoices for student materials and services charges must be accompanied by the following information:

- a description of each of the three parent payment categories
- that parents are required to provide essential education items for their children, and have the option of purchasing these through the school or through a local supplier, where appropriate
- the availability of alternative payment options and an invitation to contact the Business Manager if the parent wishes to discuss these
- a copy of the school Parent Payment policy

Administrative and Payment Processes

The school-level policy should ensure that:

- Administrative and financial processes are to be compliant with DET requirements such as CASES 21 or COMPASS financial reporting
- Invoices for unpaid essential education items or optional items accepted by parents are generated and distributed on a regular basis, but not more than once a month.
- Only the initial invitation for voluntary financial contributions is sent to all parents/guardians.
- Payments are receipted on CASES 21 and issued to parents

Consideration of Hardship – Support Options

A range of support options are available for parents experiencing in paying for essential items including:

- The Camps, Sports Excursion Fund (CSEF) is provided by the government to help with camps, sports and excursion costs and is paid yearly to eligible families and students. The amount is sent to the school and is held as a credit for camps, sports and excursions. Currently the amount is \$125.00 per year per student for primary students. Forms are available at the school office.
- Access to State Schools Relief Committee support via the Business Manager to assist with clothing/uniforms
- There is a second-hand uniform shop when volunteers are available. Details will be communicated via Compass.
- Option to pay in instalments

The Principal must exercise sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of individual students and their families. The Principal is to make decisions about how to manage non-payment of essential education items or optional extras on a case-by-case basis. Where families have difficulty making payments, the Principal is expected to discuss with them the range of support options available and to negotiate an appropriate alternative arrangement such as payment by instalments.

Parents/guardians who experience difficulties providing or paying the school to provide essential education items are encouraged to make an appointment with the Principal to discuss alternative payment methods.

Evaluation

This policy was last evaluated by the Finance Committee 2018 and ratified by School Council 2018. It is to be reviewed in 2019.

Further Information and Resources

Education and Training reform Act 2006 (sections 2.2.4. (1), 2.3.6 (1) (c). 2.2)

The full Parent Payment policy is available from the DET's School Policy and Advisory Guide – (Parent Payment)