

## **Parent Payments Policy**

### **Context**

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* ensures the provision of free instruction in the standard curriculum program to all students in government schools, and empowers school councils to charge for goods and services used in the course of instruction and to raise funds.

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 program includes core learning and teaching activities associated with the Victorian Curriculum F-10 and senior secondary certificates (VCE and VCAL, including VET programs).

### **Categories of Payments**

Schools can request payments from parents under three categories: Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items or Voluntary Financial Contributions.

**1. Essential Student Learning Items** 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 items may be: items the student takes possession of (e.g. stationery, text books, activity books, cooking ingredients, materials for products that students take home, school uniforms) and activities associated with instruction that students are expected to attend (e.g. excursions, incursions, school sports, work placements).

**2. Optional Extras** are items, activities or services that are optional and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum. They are accessed on a user-pays basis and parents and guardians may **choose** whether their child accesses or participates in them (e.g. school magazines, instrumental music tuition, graduation dinners, camps).

**3. Voluntary Financial Contributions** which parents and guardians may be **invited** to donate to the school (e.g. grounds beautification, building or library fund, general voluntary contribution).

### **Payment Arrangements & Methods**

Parents may make arrangements to pay charges in full, quarterly at the start of each term or by other payment arrangement negotiated with the Business Manager. Payments may be made in person by cash, cheque or EFTPOS, or online via BPay or direct deposit.

### **Family Support Options**

Merbein P-10 College is sensitive to the differing financial, cultural or social circumstances of individual students and their families. A range of support options are available for parents experiencing difficulty in paying for essential student learning items. These options include (but are not limited to): access to second hand items where possible; access to State Schools' Relief support to assist with uniforms, shoes, textbooks, and stationery; the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, which is available for eligible families to cover the costs of school trips, camps and sporting activities; and welfare and support agencies that have established partnership arrangements with schools to provide further assistance to students and their families.

### **Consideration of Hardship**

Parents who experience difficulties providing or paying the school to provide essential student learning items should contact the Business Manager at the school by attending the school office, by phone on (03) 5025 2501 or by email [merbein.p10@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:merbein.p10@edumail.vic.gov.au) to discuss options for support.

For parents willing to contribute but limited in their ability to, the Business Manager will use their discretion and act within the mandate of the policy and guiding principles to negotiate appropriate forms of payment assistance.

Where possible, the school may offer to reduce the size or alter the timelines of requested parent payments. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Waiving fees
- Reducing fees
- Deferring payment or the extension of payment deadlines
- Flexible payment plans – beyond what is available in the school's standard policy

### **Communication with Families**

Information regarding this policy and specific information about annual payment schedules will be communicated via the school website and the school newsletter.

Each parent will be provided with early notice of the annual payment schedule relevant to each student (in most cases during Term 4 of the preceding year). These notices will clearly identify whether items are essential student learning items or optional extras and will provide details of alternative payment options.

### **Managing Payments and Non-payments**

For any of these parent payments or voluntary financial contributions, the College Council **will not**:

- insist on payment prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used
- withhold access to enrolment or advancement to the next year level as a condition of payment of essential education items, optional extras or voluntary financial contributions
- issue more than one request for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice
- coerce or harass parents and guardians to obtain payment
- send invoices for unpaid essential education items or optional items accepted by parents more than once a month
- under any circumstances use collectors of any type, including debt collectors, to obtain any funds from parents and guardians
- disclose details of any payments or non-payments by parents and guardians to any third party.

### **Monitoring and Review of the Implementation of the Policy**

As part of the school's commitment to ongoing improvement, and ensuring that the impact of policies and practices on students are assessed in an ongoing way, implementation of the Parent Payment Policy and school practice will be reviewed as follows:

- School council will review the policy on an annual basis to ensure the school level approach to parent payments reflects the shared expectations of the whole school community and to monitor the effectiveness and impact on parents and students.
- The Department will undertake regular audits for compliance with the Parent Payment Policy.

**Date of Approval by School Council: 26<sup>th</sup> October 2016**