

## **POLICY: PARENT PAYMENTS POLICY**



### **PURPOSE**

To ensure that parent payment practices are consistent, transparent and ensure that all children have access to the standard curriculum.

### **AIM**

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**

#### **PRINCIPALS:**

- **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

#### **PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES:**

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.

**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.

**Brentwood Park's request for payments are as follows:**

1. **Essential Education Items** which parents and guardians are required to provide or pay the school to provide e.g.: stationary booklists, text books and uniforms, etc. A purchase of an iPad is requested to use in Years Five and Six.
2. **Optional Extras** which are offered on a user pays basis and parents can choose whether or not their child participates e.g.: incursions and excursions, Athletics and Reading Eggs programs, swimming program, maths competitions, instrumental music tuition, entry fee to school-based performance and events, class photos, graduation functions, camps etc.
3. **Voluntary Financial Contributions** which are non-compulsory donations for specific projects e.g.: library resources, grounds projects, or technological equipment. General voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school, including fundraising activities.

**COST AND SUPPORT TO PARENTS:**

When Brentwood Park School Council considers requests for parent payments the cost will be kept to a minimum and affordable to parents at the school by ensuring 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. The school will 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. Such as:
  - Second hand uniform sales
  - State School Relief for uniform items
  - CSEF-Camps, Sports, Excursion Fund which is available to parents who have a Centrelink Pensioner Concession, Health Care Card or is a foster parent or Veteran Affairs pensioner.
  - Local Community Support groups/agencies, such as Berwick Church of Christ Food Pantry, Casey Bible Church provides snacks for students and grocery parcels.
  - 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. A written hardship arrangement will include a proactive approach to providing support for parents experiencing financial difficulty
  - The assistant principal, Jenny Reid and business manager, Sue Moore will be the contact personnel at the school with whom parents can discuss payment arrangements. (9702 2022) Paying in instalments is an available option for parents. Parents will be encouraged to contact the assistant principal or business manager if experiencing hardship. If school personnel are aware of families facing hardship the assistant principal and/or business manager makes contact with the families.

**ENGAGING WITH PARENTS:**

The school council will engage in effective communication with the school community to ensure that parents are aware of and understand the needs and views of parents by:

- making the Parent Payment Policy available on the school's website
- the principal being available to answer inquiries about the policy in person or by phone or email

**REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY**

School Council will monitor the effectiveness and impact of the implementation of this policy annually as part of its ongoing improvement and report back to the school community.

**Date of approval by School Council: 13/9/2016**