



PARENT PAYMENTS POLICY AND GUIDELINES

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.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

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.

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.

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:

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.



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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."](#)



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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](#)



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Parent Payments Policy

The following is a summary of the main principles of the Parent Payments Policy:



FREE INSTRUCTION

- Schools provide students with free instruction to fulfil the standard curriculum requirements as outlined in the Victorian Curriculum F-10, VCE and VCAL.



PARENT PAYMENT REQUESTS

- Schools do not ask parents to pay for school operating costs (e.g. utility costs) or general and unspecified charges.
- Schools request payments from parents under three categories:

Essential Student Learning Items	Optional Items	Voluntary Contributions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Items and activities which the school deems essential for student learning. Parents may choose to purchase essential items through the school or provide their own. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Items and activities which enhance or broaden the schooling experience for students and are in addition to standard curriculum. These are provided to students on a case-by-case basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voluntary contributions support the school to continue to be the best local school for all students and can be for general or specific purpose. Students will not be disadvantaged in any way if parents do not make a contribution.

FINANCIAL HELP FOR FAMILIES

- Schools put in place financial hardship arrangements to support families who cannot pay for items or activities so that their child doesn't miss out.
- Schools have a nominated parent payment contact person(s) that parents can have a confidential discussion with regarding financial hardship arrangements.



SCHOOL PROCESSES

- Schools obtain school council approval for their parent payment arrangements and upload their arrangements on their school's public website for transparency.



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POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Parent Payment Charges

Altona Primary School has selected the most appropriate requisites to meet the needs of our students. We ensure that costs are kept to a minimum and articulate how payment requests support/enrich the school's learning/teaching program

Please Note: Clear specification of the Items, description and costs within the three payment categories are identified on the Compass Portal – Course Confirmation communication.

Altona Primary School requests payments from Parents/Carers under the following categories only:

Essential Education Items are those items or services that are essential to support the course of instruction in the standard curriculum program that parents are responsible for and may choose to either provide or pay the school to provide. At Altona Primary School, essential items include:

- Materials that the student takes possession of, including textbooks and student stationery. These include individual materials that are packed and provided to each individual student. Items vary per year level.
- Shared materials that are provided for students to use daily and are purchased in bulk and distributed to students when required in class. Items vary between years levels.
- Subject Resource Contributions are the items bought in bulk to support specialised programs such as Art, Italian, PE, Integrated Studies, Sound Waves and Values education.
- Incursion/Excursion Levy

Voluntary financial contributions are those items and services under which parents are invited to make a donation to the School, for example for grounds maintenance or building trust. Altona Primary School invites parents and carers to make a voluntary contribution to the Garden & Maintenance fund (\$30 per family). Families are also welcome to make a voluntary contribution to the school, nominating their preferred amount.

Optional education items can also be referred to as non-essential materials and services. These items are those that are provided in addition to the standard curriculum program, and which are offered to all students. These optional extras are provided on a user-pays basis and if parents choose to access them for students, they will be required to pay for each item as they are required throughout the school year. These items can include:

- Extra-curricular programs or activities e.g. instrumental music, choir
- School-based performances, productions and events
- Excursions and incursions
- Additional school items such as student/ class photographs, school magazine
- Before and after school care.

Payment arrangements and methods

Parents will be provided with early notice of payment request for essential education items, optional items and voluntary financial contributions with a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous school year. Families requiring alternative arrangements such as payment plans can contact the School Principal's or Business Manager to enact said arrangements.



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Other Guidelines include:

- The Compass App is the preferred method for making payments and consenting to events such as incursions and excursions.
- The QKR App is the preferred method for Out of School Hours Care Program (OSHC), book list and excursion/incursion payments.
- Both the Compass App and QKR Apps are available to download in the applicable store for android and apple devices. If you require assistance using the Compass or QKR Apps, please contact the school office for assistance.
- EFTPOS payments can be processed at the school office; however, this is not the preferred option. Payment envelopes are available at the school office for this purpose. Once completed, payment envelopes can be provided to the classroom teacher or given to the school office. EFTPOS payments cannot be taken over the phone.
- Cash will only be accepted for fundraising initiatives such as special lunch days, raffles etc.

Family support options

At Altona primary School we appreciate that families may sometimes experience financial difficulties in meeting requests for payments and contributions. A range of support options are available to assist parents, including:

- The **Camps, Sports and Excursion fund (CSEF)** supports families who met eligibility criteria set by the Victorian Government to ensure the student has the opportunity to participate in important, educational and fun activities;
- The **State Schools Relief Committee** support, applications can be made via the Principal to assist with clothing/uniforms;
- **Welfare and support agencies** that have established partnership arrangements with schools to provide further assistance to students and their families;
- No student will be treated differently, denied access or refused instruction to the standard curriculum program for not making a payment or voluntary contribution;
- Secondhand uniform and low cost options e.g. school clothing pool, low cost suppliers.

Consideration of hardship

At times, families may experience circumstances that prevent them from participating fully in school life. At Altona primary School we believe that it is important that every support is provided to ensure all can access and participate in learning experiences at school.

- The school nominated parent payment contact persons are the school Principal's or Business Manager. They can be contacted by families by phone, email or in person about their financial situation and related difficulties in making payments. The school contacts will use discretion and negotiate appropriate forms of payment assistance. Parents can make general inquiries about charges by contacting the school on (03) 9398 2925 or via email: altona.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au
- The processes for meeting/communicating with parents experiencing hardship, including information to be provided are set out in the school fees communication each year. Hardship will be dealt with on a case by case basis to ensure the best outcome for the family and the school, this may include a payment plan, reduction in fees, assistance from State Schools relief, application for CSEF or other avenues of support.
- Teachers that are aware of families experiencing hardship should refer them directly to the school contacts to ensure support for those families.



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Communication with families

- The Parent Payment Policy will be published in the policies tab on APS news which is available via the Altona Primary School Website. The policy will also be sent to all families when annual fees are communicated 6 weeks before the end of the year prior to them being due;
- Key aspects of the Parent Payment Policy will be included in the information provided to parents with the student requisites list each year;
- If families wish to raise any issues, make general inquiries about charges or complaints please contact the school Principal or Business Manager on (03) 9398 2925 or via email: altona.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Related School Policies

- Complaints and Concerns Policy
- Electronic Funds Management Policy
- Cash Handling Policy
- Camps and Excursions Policy
- Digital Technologies Acceptable use Policy

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](#)

EVALUATION AND REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually by School Council to ensure the process of requesting fees is transparent and easy to understand with clear options for parents experiencing hardship. Proposed amendments to this policy will be discussed with and include consultation i.e. Administration Staff, Leadership Team, Finance subcommittee, School Council as part of the school's commitment to report back to the school community. The Parent Payment Policy will be communicated with parents via the school website.