



**DONCASTER**  
SECONDARY COLLEGE

## PAYMENT POLICY

College council will review this policy annually

**Date approved:** March 2019

**Date of next review:** 2020

## PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

### Doncaster 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 / guardian payment charges and can request payments 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 / guardians 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 / guardians choose to access them for students, they are required to pay for them.

#### Voluntary Financial Contributions

Parents / guardians 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:

## PRINCIPLES

- **Educational value:** Student learning, aspirations and wellbeing are paramount when schools determine their parent / guardian 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 / guardians 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 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 / GUARDIANS

When school councils consider the proposed requests for parent / guardian payments the cost is kept to a minimum and is affordable to most parents / guardians 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 / guardians 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 / guardians so that they know what to expect and what supports they can access
- parents / guardians 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 / guardians to save and budget accordingly.
- parents / guardians are provided with reasonable notice of any other payment requests that arise during the school year- ensuring parents / guardians 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 / guardians 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 / guardians is not permitted
- there will be only one reminder notice to parents / guardians for voluntary financial contributions per year
- Invoices/statements for unpaid essential or optional items accepted by parents / guardians are not generated more than monthly or according to the parent / guardian 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 / guardians.

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 / guardians are provided the name and contact details of a nominated parent / guardian 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 / guardian 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 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 / guardians 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
  - camps, 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 / GUARDIAN PAYMENT CHARGES**

### **RATIONALE AND PURPOSE**

Under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 the Education Department provides funding for a standard curriculum program, delivery of instruction and other associated costs for running the school. The Act grants College Council the power to charge fees for goods and services to support the delivery of free instruction and to raise funds. The cost of providing the continued services offered to students at the College has proven to be significantly beyond that provided by funds for a standard curriculum. The provision of a comprehensive curriculum that meets the needs, expectations, breadth and educational standards demanded by our community necessitates additional payments.

### **GUIDELINES**

There are three payment categories: Essential Education Items, Optional Education Items (user pays) and Voluntary Financial Contributions. This policy clarifies parent and guardians and College obligations and rights regarding these payment categories:

- costs are kept to a minimum;
- payment requests are clearly itemised under the three parent 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 of voluntary contribution; and
- access to enrolment at the College or advancement to the next year level will not be withheld as a condition of fee payment.

Parents and guardians may in some instances have the option of purchasing equivalent materials from other sources for Essential Educational Items. If parents and guardians choose to provide equivalent materials, this must be done in consultation with the school, as items need to meet the specifications provided by the school. There may also be certain items that due to their nature may only be provided by the College.

### **PAYMENT CATEGORIES**

#### **Essential Education Items**

These items include:

- materials that the student takes possession of, including text books and student stationary;
- materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished articles (e.g. Food, Photography, Art);
- school uniform; and
- activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend (e.g. Entrance fees for Sports Carnivals).

#### **Optional Education Items** (user pays materials and services)

For example, items such as:

- personal student computer printing;
- extra-curricular programs or activities, e.g. instrumental music, dance classes, camps, excursions and incursions;
- school-based performances, productions and events; and
- school magazines, class photographs.

#### **Voluntary Financial Contributions**

Parents or guardians are invited to make a donation to the College, e.g. Library Fund or Building Fund (Tax deductible), grounds maintenance and welfare support programs.

## **PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS**

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

To further assist parents / guardians with payments, payment options have been developed, including:

- Option A** Full amount by the beginning of Term 1
- Option B** Payment instalments; or
- Option C** Other payment arrangements, including individual payment plans.

Alternative payment options are available through the College and parents / guardians are encouraged to make an appointment with the school 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.

Receipts will be issued immediately upon payment.

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

## **FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS**

Eligible families may use the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund (CSEF) payment for expenses relating to Camps, Sport and/or Excursions.

Eligible families may receive free or discounted uniforms, school shoes, textbooks, graphic calculators and stationery through State Schools Relief.

## **CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP**

For parents and guardians experiencing hardship, please contact the Business Manager via phone, email or in person regarding their financial situation and related difficulties in making payments.

Note: The College will employ proactive strategies to engage with parents and guardians who may be experiencing hardship, such as discretely approaching families who may need support and special payment arrangements.

## **COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES**

The policy and the College's implementation will be communicated to all families in hard copy on enrolment and is permanently available on the College website.

Families can contact the Business Manager to raise any issues or make general enquiries about charges.