



Parent Payment Policy

Purpose

To ensure that parent payment practices are consistent, transparent and fair for parents

Rationale

The Victorian community shares a vision to build an education system that champions excellence and ensures that each student has access to the opportunities to succeed in life, regardless of their background or circumstances.

The college is 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 the college to provide an enriched learning and teaching program for every student and is highly valued by the college community.

Learning and teaching programs vary based on local needs and circumstances and reflect the college's priorities, decisions and resources. This, in turn, informs the parent payment charges approved by college council.

What Can Colleges 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 colleges. College council is responsible for developing and approving college-level parent payment charges and can request payments from parents¹ under three categories only: Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary 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 college considers essential for all students, and for which students take possession. Parents may choose to provide the items themselves or buy the items from the college where practical and appropriate. The majority of Essential Student Learning Items are GST free. However, some foods and maths calculators do attract GST.
- **Optional** 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 Contributions** which parents and guardians are invited to donate to the College Library, the Building Fund and/or the Parents & Citizens Association. All donations to the College Library and Building Fund are fully tax deductible.

The Attachment on page 5, "*Parent Payment Policy Categories*", provides examples of items and materials under each category. The college's *Student Booklist* clearly depicts each item's category as either an Essential Student Learning Item, an Optional Item or a Voluntary Contribution.

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.

Principles

This policy adheres to the following principles:

- **Educational value:** Student learning, aspirations and wellbeing are paramount when the college determines 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 college program is facilitated
- **Affordability:** Cost to parents is kept to a minimum and is affordable for most families at the college
- **Engagement and Support:** Early identification and engagement strategies by the college 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:** College parent payment practices are well communicated, clear and transparent and their impact on student programs and families are reviewed by college council

Cost and Support to Parents

The college's processes and procedures 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 college
- 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 all Book-listed payment requests for college fees (i.e. a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous college year). This enables parents to save and budget accordingly.
- parents are provided with reasonable notice of any other payment requests that arise during the college 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 college personnel
- parents experiencing hardship are not pursued for outstanding college fees from one year to the next
- use of debt collectors to obtain outstanding college funds owed to the college from parents is not permitted
- there will be only one reminder notice to parents for voluntary contributions per year
- Invoices/statements for unpaid essential or optional items accepted by parents are not generated more than monthly.

Support for Families

Families may experience financial difficulties and may be unable to meet the full or part payments requested. College protocols 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.

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. The college has arrangements that include a proactive approach to providing support for parents experiencing financial difficulty.

Parents who have difficulty paying for Essential Student Learning Items may have access to a range of support options through the Department of Human Services, CentreLink, Anglicare, and Kids Under Cover. Centrepay is a free, voluntary service for CentreLink customers to pay expenses as regular deductions from their CentreLink payments at:

<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/centrepay>

The college exercises sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of individual students and their families. The college's Welfare Support team coordinates alternative payment strategies for Essential Student Learning Items on a case-by-case basis, where a payment plan may be arranged.

Families and students have the opportunity to purchase quality second-hand books and calculators. Further financial assistance for eligible students can be accessed through the Camps, Sports & Excursions Fund at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/csef.aspx>

Engaging with Parents

In respect to the college's development of its parent payments, college council will ensure effective communication with the college community. Parents are forwarded a fully itemized request for payment, for items that are not paid through the Booklist process.

Refunds

This policy provides for the refund of charges that have been paid by parents/guardians or students, for activities in the following circumstances:

- an excursion/incursion has been cancelled,
- the cost of an activity was over-estimated,
- eligible reimbursements where purchases are made by parents/guardians/students who have scholarships or independent support funding,
- a subject change has resulted in a lower charge,
- where there has been an overpayment and,
- where there has been a duplicated payment.

Refunds are paid to the parent/guardian by cheque or electronic direct deposit into a parent/guardian's designated bank account, on the completion of a *Refund Form* (available from the finance office).

When a student exits the college, their relevant teachers will determine the proportional usage of materials, consumables, and/or resources used, which will form the basis of the refund.

Review of Policy Implementation

The college 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 college community.

Parent Payment Charges

The annual Student Booklist provides clear descriptions of listed items, and their relevant costs associated within the three payment categories: Essential Student Learning Items, Voluntary Contributions and Optional Items.

Learning area budget managers are responsible for ensuring that parent charges are accurately costed, and that they are available to discuss inquires relating to a particular charge[s].

CERTIFICATION

This policy was adopted at the College Council meeting held on 13th Day of October 2020

Signed:

Signed:

Dale Pearce
Principal

Damien Tangey
College President

Date of Review: September 2020
Person Responsible: Finance Manager
Date of Next Review: September 2021

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY CATEGORIES

This list provides some examples of common items for each of the 3 parent payment categories. It is not intended to be exhaustive or definitive and does not take into consideration the college's context or how a school delivers the standard curriculum.

Essential Student Learning Items

Includes items that students take permanent possession of, materials for final products that students take home and curriculum related activities that students participate in such as:

- Booklist items – e.g. stationery, textbooks, workbooks, novels, calculators
- Online subscriptions to learning activities (as content is essential for student learning in the curriculum) – e.g. Edrolo
- Consumable materials which students use to make something and then take possession of or consume (materials must be clearly specified, where practical):
 - Art/Technology Subjects – e.g. canvas, paint, clay, special paper, wood, metals, plastics
 - Food/Home Economic Subjects – e.g. cooking ingredients that students will consume such as flour, eggs, milk, meats
- Curriculum excursions (directly related to curriculum outcomes) – e.g. Shakespeare play for English, Art Gallery for Art
- Student ID card

Where payment is not made for an essential student learning item or activity and the student does not provide their own, the college must make alternative arrangements e.g. make the item available through the college or provide alternative financial support options.

Optional Items

Includes items and activities that enhance or broaden the schooling experience of students and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum such as:

- Electives and additional academic programs:
 - Instrumental music lessons
 - Elective extension classes, e.g. advanced STEM classes
- School photos
- Locks for lockers and bicycles
- Magazine/newspaper subscriptions
- School events and functions such as graduations, formals, socials
- Extra-curricular activities
- Optional camps & excursions that are not related to the curriculum

Voluntary Contributions

Includes items for general or clearly explained specific purposes that relate to the school council's functions and objectives such as:

- General voluntary contributions towards classroom materials, class sets and school equipment – e.g. classroom set of textbooks; photocopying and printing of worksheets; science equipment and materials for experiments; sports equipment
- School sports events that all students are expected to attend but are offered in addition to the standard curriculum
- Building or Library fund (Tax deductible)
- Voluntary contributions for any other specific purpose