

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY 2019

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RATIONALE:

This policy is governed by the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (the Act) which provides for free instruction in the standard curriculum program to all students in government schools.

BACKGROUND

'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 refers to the eight key learning areas – English, Mathematics, Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, the Arts, Languages, Health and Physical Education, and Technologies, and four capability areas – Critical and Creative thinking, Intercultural, Ethical and Personal and Social.

The standard curriculum for years F-10 means the 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.

The Department allocates funding to schools through the Student Resource Package (SRP). This includes funding for the standard curriculum program, including associated administration, equipment, facilities and operational costs. The Act also empowers school councils to charge parents for items that the school provides or makes available to the student. The items may be categorised as either Essential Student Learning Items or Optional Items.

School council may also ask parents to make a voluntary financial contribution to the school for a stated purpose.

DEFINITIONS

DEBTS: for internal college financial audit requirement, unpaid charges for Essential Student Learning Item constitute a debt.

AIM

To ensure that parent payment practices at Brighton Secondary College are consistent, transparent and that all children have access to the standard curriculum. The Departmental Policy that this policy conforms with can be viewed at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/Pages/parentpayments.aspx>

PARENT PAYMENT CATEGORIES

This table describes the three parent payment categories that college councils can request payments from parents.

ESSENTIAL 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.

- materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished articles (e.g. home economics, photography, catering)
- services such as Library, ICT, Student Health and Wellbeing support
- school uniform (where applicable)
- activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend, such as costs associated with excursions and work placements

Note: If parents/guardians choose to provide equivalent materials themselves, this should be done in consultation with the college, and items should meet the specifications provided by the college. However, there are some items (e.g. food provisions for home economics) which, due to their nature, can only be provided by the college.

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.

These items may include:

- instructional support material, resources and administration in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. student computer printing for personal use)
- extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum program (E.g. swimming programs, instrumental music etc)
- college-based performances, productions and events
- materials for subjects where the payment sought is the difference between the basic materials/services required for access to the standard curriculum program and higher cost alternatives which may be more desirable (e.g. the use of more expensive materials)
- materials and services offered in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. college magazines)
- college facilities and equipment not associated with providing the standard curriculum program, and not otherwise provided for through the SRP (e.g. student accident insurance, and hire or lease of equipment such as musical instruments).

VOLUNTARY FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Parents/guardians, or anyone else, can be invited to make a philanthropic donation to the college for the following purposes:

- contributions to a building trust fund or contributions to a library trust fund (these trust funds are approved by the Australian Taxation Office and are tax deductible)
- contributions for a specific purpose identified by the college (e.g. equipment, materials or services) in addition to those funded through the SRP.
- Other voluntary non-tax deductible financial contributions.

PRINCIPLES

In respect to parent payments, the College will adhere to the following 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

IMPLEMENTATION:

The College will 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
- 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.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

- This policy will be made available to parents through posting on the College information portal (Compass)
- Every reasonable effort will be made to communicate the general purpose of the College charge structure to parents
- If parents have a concern, query or require assistance with this policy, they may direct these to the College Registrar/Families Finance officer, at familyfinance@brightonsc.vic.edu.au

CAMPS

Parent payments for camps have been clarified using the two categories below.

- **CAMPS THAT FALL WITHIN THE ESSENTIAL STUDENT LEARNING ITEM CATEGORY:** This includes compulsory camps that support the provision of the core curriculum (Victorian Curriculum/VCE/VCAL). These are often subject-based camps. Parents can be charged for them and if they choose not to send their child, alternative educational activities that achieve an equivalent education outcome is required to be provided by the college. Example, Biology camp. Compulsory co-curricular camps related to supporting the course of instruction in the standard curriculum. Parents can be required to pay for this category of essential student learning items. If a parent does not pay for this category of camp, their child may be excluded from the camp and an alternative activity program that achieves equivalent outcomes is not required to be provided by the college. Example Year level camps.
- **CAMPS THAT FALL WITHIN THE OPTIONAL ITEMS CATEGORY:** This includes non-compulsory extra-curricular camps. These camps do not support the provision of the core curriculum. They are optional and there is no requirement for the college to provide an alternative activity for non-participants or to provide assistance in accessing these camps in cases of hardship. Example, World Challenge Expedition.

HARDSHIP

ASSESSMENT OF PARENTAL HARDSHIP

The College will consider hardship arrangements for families who are experiencing chronic, long-term financial hardship or short-term crises on a case-by-case basis for assistance with Section 1 Essential Student Learning Items only. Families experiencing hardship should apply to the College Registrar/Families Finance Officer, to investigate what assistance the College may be able to provide. Please email familyfinance@brightonsc.vic.edu.au

LONG TERM HARDSHIP

Families in possession of a valid means-tested concession card and/or the receipt of Centrelink benefits or allowances will be deemed to experiencing long-term hardship.

SHORT TERM HARDSHIP

The College understands that there are also a number of circumstances that can impact a family's ability to pay student fees. In either the short or long-term, such circumstances can include, but are not limited to:

- Death of an immediate family member or friend
- Family breakdown or severe family disruption e.g. divorce/separation of parents; substance dependence and addiction

- Illness, including serious long term illness or mental illness of the parent or family member
- Family violence
- Homelessness, at risk of homelessness or impacted by transitional housing
- Out-of-home care arrangements or temporary foster parents
- Loss of employment
- Financial stress resulting in difficulty paying the bills, providing food or meeting essential costs, such as medical or transport costs.
- Natural disaster such as drought, bushfire or flood
- Refugee status, including families on a Bridging Visa, Temporary Protection Visa, community detention and asylum seeker families
- Other factors resulting in unforeseen change in the parent's capacity to make payments, whether through a reduction in income or through an increase in non-discretionary expenditure

4.2 HARDSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

For parents who are limited in their ability to contribute to College charges, the College Registrar will use their discretion and act within the mandate of the policy and guiding principles to negotiate appropriate forms of payment assistance. Parents who have formally demonstrated long-term hardship to the satisfaction of the college will not be pursued for outstanding school fees from one year to the next. Individual family hardship arrangements will be reviewed annually.

Where possible, the College will offer to reduce either the amount of College charges payable or alter the timelines of requested parent payments. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Waiving fees
- Reduced fees
- Deferred payment or the extension of payment deadlines
- Flexible payment plans – beyond what is available in the school's standard policy
- Loan-to-own strategies, such as for devices and other hardware.

The College also offers a range of support options that help reduce costs for families, particularly those experiencing financial difficulty. These may include making items and services more affordable, referral to government assistance programs, and developing partnerships with community organisations. For more information, see [Cost Support for Families](#).

EVALUATION

This policy replaces/updates the Parent Payment policy 2015-2018 (last updated 06/10/2015) and from 2018 will run on an annual review cycle

This policy was endorsed by the College Finance Committee on 15th August 2018.

This policy was ratified by College Council on 22nd August 2018.

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

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

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