

# PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Somerville 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 payment charges and can request payments from parents<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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 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.”](#)

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](#)

## 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
  - camp, 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

# Somerville Secondary College

## Parent Payment Policy

### PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

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#### ESSENTIAL STUDENT LEARNING ITEMS

Essential Student Learning Items include:

- Materials that the individual student takes possession of, including textbooks and student stationery. (e.g. Student organiser/planner, College produced curriculum workbooks, handbooks and instructional materials)
- Materials that the individual student consumes or takes possession of the finished article. (e.g. Technology-based subjects, photography etc.)
- School uniform as per the College uniform policy
- Camps and excursions which are integral to the standard curriculum and which all students are expected to attend

*If parents/guardians choose to provide equivalent materials for 'Essential Student Learning Items' from sources other than the school, the items must meet the specifications provided by the College. Some items (e.g. food provision for home economics) which due to their nature, can only be provided by the College.*

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#### OPTIONAL ITEMS

Optional items include:

- Instructional support materials beyond the provision of the standard curriculum program. (e.g. student computer printing & internet access for personal, recreational or non-school use)
- Extracurricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum program or provided by outside specialists (e.g. Instrumental music)
- College based performances, productions and events
- The difference between the basic materials/services provided and a selected higher cost alternative which may be more desirable
- Materials and services offered in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. College magazine, locks)
- College facilities and equipment not associated with the provision of the standard curriculum program (e.g. hire or lease of equipment such as musical instruments, lockers etc.)

*Participation in non-curriculum related activities, not limited to but including activities such as Formals, Debutante Balls, Year 12 Valedictory Dinner and various extra-curricular camps and excursions may be restricted if a participating student's 'Essential Student Learning Items' charges have not been paid in full.*

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#### VOLUNTARY FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The college seeks voluntary financial contributions for the following:

- College Building and Grounds Fund
- College Computer Technology Fund
- College Library Fund
- College Chaplaincy Fund
- College Welfare Fund
- First Aid Equipment
- State Schools Relief

# Somerville Secondary College

## Parent Payment Policy

### PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

- All parent payments are receipted through the Department required accounting software CASES 21 and issued to parents via their students or by mail.
- Somerville Secondary College will not provide credit in advance for the purchase of books, stationery or uniform from outsourced suppliers.
- A deposit may be required upon enrolment in an individual elective to confirm the enrolment and the purchase of specialist materials for the selected course.
- Where a parent or student fails to pay the expected elective charge and only after reasonable time has been allowed for payment to occur, the student may, at the Principal's discretion, be offered an alternative lower or no cost elective in replacement of the higher cost elective. It is an expectation that the alternative elective will be paid in full within two (2) weeks of commencement if a lower cost is involved.
- Parents/guardians have the option of establishing a payment plan through liaison with the Business Manager.

### FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

- Second hand uniform is available at the college in limited sizes.
- Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund (CSEF) can be used for eligible students to attend relevant activities.
- State Schools Relief
- Parents/Guardians are provided with alternative options for their children if they choose not to participate in an excursion or camp.

### CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

- Parents should contact the Business Manager, Jo Pyne, by phone, email or in person about their financial situation and related difficulties in making payments.
- Processes for supporting families experiencing hardship will be discussed on an individual basis and directed to relevant personnel as applicable.
- The Business Manager will use prior knowledge of parent/guardian situations to support families who may need assistance and discretely approach as and when necessary.
- Payment arrangements and referral to support agencies will be made available to all parents/guardians where families have difficulty making payments.

### COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

- The Parent Payment Policy will be sent out annually in Term 4 regarding the next year's fees and charges.
- Initial payment requests, letters or invoices for student materials & services charges will be accompanied by a description of the payment category, how the payment will be spent by the school, the availability of payment options and a copy of this policy.
- The policy will be accessible through the schools website.
- Any concerns regarding charges and payment should be directed to the Main Office via phone, in person or email.
- The status and details of payments and non-payments by parents and guardians are confidential and are not available for public information.
- The College may elect to notify parents of outstanding charges by posting a Statement of Accounts to the person nominated to receive correspondence for a particular student. The accounts are normally processed once a term, but in some instances may be processed more often, where directed by College Council and / or the Principal.

Somerville Secondary College  
**Parent Payment Policy**

**MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY**

- The College Council will review the policy annually, and welcome feedback from the community via the Main Office or any standing member of the College Council.
- The College Council will monitor the implementation of the policy through both sub-committee meetings and College council meetings.
- Any charges regarding the policy will be communicated to the parent/guardian community in a timely manner via the College Newsletter and updating of policy on the college website.

**Date of approval by School Council**

**September 2018**