



# Parent Payment Policy

Council Ratification: 13/05/2020

Reviewed: 27/04/2020

## POLICY

Fairhills High School will ask for parent payment contributions that assist the school in providing an enriched learning and teaching program. The school will ensure that parent payment practices are consistent, transparent and ensure that all children have access to the standard curriculum.

## DEPARTMENT 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.

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 (see below).

## IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

Detailed implementation guidelines are developed by the staff through the established consultative committee process. These are developed within the parameters of the Council policy and can be changed as circumstances or strategies change without further reference to Council.

---

<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.

## GUIDELINES

- 1.1 Fairhills High School Council will annually review parent payments requested to ensure that costs are kept to a minimum and are affordable to most parents at the school and that they comply with Department of Education and Training guidelines.
- 1.2 Parents and guardians will be provided with notice of requests for payment of Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items or Voluntary Financial Contributions in October of the preceding year. Early payment may be requested but will not be required prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used. Parents may pay in a lump sum, by arranged instalments or individual payment plans.
- 1.3 Charges will be clearly itemised, costed and categorised under three categories –
  1. **Essential Student Learning Items** : 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.
  2. **Optional Items** : 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.
  3. **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, building fund, library fund or for new equipment. Only some Voluntary Financial Contributions are tax-deductible.

For further details see the “Understanding Parent Payments” document provided by the Education Department and the parent payments information provided on the website at

[http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/spag/management/P\\_Parent-Payments\\_diagram.pdf](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/spag/management/P_Parent-Payments_diagram.pdf)

- 1.4 Parent contribution requests will be made in line with 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

For a more detailed explanation of costs and how payment supports the school's learning and teaching program refer to the "Explanation of Costs to Parents, 2020" Fairhills document supplied to parents each year as part of the re-enrolment process.

- 1.5 The School Principal and Business Manager 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
  - 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.
- 1.5 Parent contributions will be requested to assist the College in providing and enhanced teaching and learning program for every student which will be aligned with College priorities. Students will not be treated differently, denied access to the standard curriculum program, or refused instruction on the basis of payments not being made for Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items or Voluntary Financial Contributions.
- 1.6 Only one reminder notice to parents for voluntary financial contributions will be issued each year. Debt collectors will not be used to try to obtain outstanding school fees from parents.
- 1.7 Participation in non-curricular activities and optional items (e.g. Instrumental Music Program, Overseas study tours, Year 12 Formal, Year 11 Presentation Ball and other

like activities), are conditional on payment for specific items or activities (e.g. Optional Items charges).

- 1.8 Students will not be denied access to enrolment or advancement to the next year level as a condition of payment of Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items or Voluntary Financial Contributions.
- 1.9 Records of payments or contributions by parents and guardians will be kept confidential.
- 1.10 Receipts will be issued to parents immediately upon making payment.
- 1.11 Parents and guardians will be provided with an alternative education program for their student if they choose not to participate in an excursion or camp.
- 1.12 Fairhills High School administrative and financial processes are compliant with Departmental requirements such as CASES 21 financial reporting.
- 1.13 The school understands that families may experience financial difficulties or hardship at times and may be unable to meet full or part payments requested. The Principal and School Council will exercise sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of students and their families when considering parent payment fees. Families experiencing financial hardship are invited to contact the Accounts Receivable Officer, Michelle Hodson, to make payment arrangements or alternatively can contact the Wellbeing Team Leader for a confidential discussion and information regarding support options.
- 1.14 There are a number of support options available for parents including but not limited to • donations of second hand uniform • Camps, Sports & Excursion Funding (CSEF) available to eligible parents • State Schools Relief support available for uniforms/footwear/calculators/textbooks (via the Wellbeing Team) • Local community supports (Wellbeing Team can provide further information). Information regarding support options is available from the general office and will be advertised periodically in the school newsletter.
- 1.15 Communication with parents will be provided with a clear description of each of the three parent payment categories, Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items or Voluntary Financial Contributions. The Parent Payment Policy and implementation details will be published on the Fairhills website. General enquiries regarding parent statements may be made to the Business Manager, Mel Nicholson on 9758 5022.
- 1.16 Fairhills High School Council will monitor payment issues and conduct an annual review of the implementation of the Parent Payment Policy. Any changes to the Policy Implementation will be reported to the College community via the College website. Reference:  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/financial/Pages/parentpayments.aspx>  
x

**Annual date of approval by School Council – May 2021.**

**Related documents –**

- Explanation of Costs to Parents, 2020 (HW 389)
- Understanding Parent Payments (document from Department website)