PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION
Williamstown High School

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 parents1 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.

In implementing this policy, schools must adhere to the following principles:

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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

- **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](#)
Parent Payment Policy
Williamstown High School

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES
Schools work in close partnership with parents and the broader school community to provide the best educational opportunities and outcomes for students both inside and outside the classroom. Through this partnership, parents understand that the contribution they make to their children's education, in all its various forms, has an important role in enriching the school's learning and teaching program and improving educational outcomes. The commitment from parents to contribute, benefits students and results in improved achievement outcomes and wellbeing and engagement in learning. This is why parent contribution is highly valued by school communities.

Essential Student Learning Items which parents and guardians are required to provide, or pay the school to provide, include but are not limited to locker provision, student diary, print credits, text or resource books, student stationery, materials for learning where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished article (eg. food technology, photography, woodwork etc), school uniform (where applicable) and activities associated with, but not part of instruction in the standard curriculum program, such as costs associated with camps and excursions where all students are expected to attend (e.g. transport and entrance costs).

Optional Items are those subjects or activities offered on a user-pays basis for which parents or guardians can choose whether or not their child participates, as the resources required to run those programs go beyond the standard curriculum. Students wishing to participate in Optional Education programs and extra-curricula activities which include but are not limited to instrumental music tuition and instrument hire, accelerated sport, interstate and overseas study and sport trips, excursions and dinners, must meet the full cost of the activity and be up to date with all Essential Student Learning Items before the student participates. Exceptions to this must be addressed in writing to the Principal.

Voluntary Financial Contributions allow Williamstown High School to provide additional resources to further enrich the curriculum. School Council invites parents and guardians to make donations by means of voluntary financial contributions which are non-compulsory donations for specific projects, such as but not limited to WHS Theatre Building Fund (approved by the Australian Taxation Office and tax deductible) library resources, grounds projects and technologies equipment. Donations to Parents and Friends Association and Student Assistance Fund are also invited and much appreciated for the assistance it provides for school projects and individual student needs.

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS
Parents will be provided with early notification of annual payment requests prior to the new school year. Reasonable notice will be given for any other payment requests during the year (i.e. excursions). Parents will be permitted to make payments in instalments, and be provided with several methods of making payment including, cash, cheque, B-Pay, and Eftpos. Parents are able to enter into confidential payment arrangements by contacting the school Business Manager, Tracey Fogarty on 9397 1899 or fogarty.tracey.l@edumail.vic.gov.au

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS
There are a number of support options available for parents including but not limited to;
- Camps, Sports & Excursion Funding (CSEF) available to eligible parents
- State Schools Relief support available for uniforms/footwear/calculators/textbooks (via the Student Welfare Coordinators)
- Local community supports (Student Welfare Coordinators can provide further information)
Information regarding support options are available from each general office.
CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP
The school understands that families may experience financial difficulties or hardship at times and may be unable to meet full or part payments requested. Families are invited to contact the Business Manager to make payment arrangements or alternatively can contact the Wellbeing team for a confidential discussion and information regarding support options.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES
The Parent Payment Policy and Implementation will be published on the school website and through mail distribution. General enquiries regarding parent charges may be made to either general office on 9397 1899 or 9399 9228. Concerns should be directed in the first instance to the Business Manager. Statements for unpaid Essential Student Learning Items and Optional Items will be distributed on a regular basis.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY
The School Council (via the Finance Committee) will conduct an annual review of the implementation of the Parent Payment Policy including addressing any concerns raised by the school community. Any changes to the Policy Implementation will be reported back to the community via notice on the school website.

Date of approval by School Council 18 October 2016