



ALTONA P-9 COLLEGE

Parent Payments/Refund policy ***PLACED ON SCHOOL WEBSITE***

First Developed: May 2014

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**Updated: November 2015, February, August, September, October & November 2016
& January 2017**

Rationale

- The Victorian community shares a vision to build an education system that champions equity and excellence and ensures that every child and young person is supported to learn.
- Underpinning each school's vision for excellence is a commitment that all Victorian students have access to the opportunities to succeed in life, regardless of their background or circumstance, and that no-one is left behind. This enables an approach to educational achievement, engagement and wellbeing which draws on the best evidence and is responsive to local circumstances and need.
- Schools work in close partnership with parents/carers 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, wellbeing and engagement in learning. This is why parent contribution is highly valued by school communities.
- Schools design and develop their learning and teaching programs drawing on the best educational knowledge and practices and strive to offer broad and enriched opportunities to students that are above and beyond what is required in the standard curriculum. Learning and teaching programs vary across schools to reflect the priorities, decisions and needs of each school and this, in turn, informs the fees set by School Councils.
- Schools are best placed to make decisions about their learning and teaching program and how to ensure there is equity and access to education for all students as well as a robust and comprehensive learning program that supports student aspirations.
- Open and purposeful engagement with parents is vital for ensuring the best possible outcomes for students, the health and wellbeing of the school community and to supporting good outcomes for schools. This encompasses the exchange of ideas where parents feel they have opportunities to be heard and have been involved in discussion about their child's learning.
- The [Framework for Improving Student Outcomes](#) recognises that the greatest impact on student outcomes is the home environment. When schools strengthen relationships with families, they can enhance the environment that has the greatest impact on students. Schools acknowledge this valuable relationship and as part of a whole of school approach, work to create a positive school environment in which parents are welcomed, respected and valued as partners in their children's learning.
- Parent consultation and engagement is therefore critical in all aspects of the educational context including parent payments. The *Act* specifies that schools need to be informed of, and take into account the views of the school community. In respect to parent payments, school councils must have strategies in place to ensure they are aware of and understand the needs and views of their communities when determining parent payments. To identify and understand the needs of families who are hard to reach and disengaged schools are encouraged to connect with and engage their local welfare and community organisations that provide support for these families.
School councils must give consideration to how an item, activity or service supports or enriches the school's learning and teaching program when determining whether the item, activity or service is an Essential Student Learning Item or an Optional Item, and must be able to explain the reasoning to the broader school community.

- As the context of each school is unique, schools choose from a range of strategies to communicate with families in parent payment processes. Whatever the particular engagement strategies used, schools need to at a minimum:
 - advise parents how the school’s learning and teaching program is enhanced by the parent payment charges being requested
 - communicate how parent payments are specifically utilised to support improved outcomes for students
 - use existing or new communication channels to enable a range of viewpoints to be represented
 - address any concerns raised
 - ensure parents are informed and understand that while they are expected to provide essential education items to support their child’s education, it is their choice whether they purchase items through the school
 - ensure parents are made aware of financial and other supports available to them and the means to access them
 - upload the Parent Payment Policy and Frequently Asked Questions onto the school’s website
- It is critical that school communities, parents, key stakeholders and the Department can see how the parent payment policy is being implemented at the local level. Therefore, ensuring schools assess the impact of the policy on students and parents is important. The Transparency Framework (docx - 88.27kb) assists schools in their implementation and compliance with the policy. It includes a Transparency Checklist Tool that enables self-assessment of open and transparent processes and practices. This tool can be used to provide a good practice framework upon which policy implementation can be regularly reviewed and reported on. Schools are strongly encouraged to work through the checklist at least annually.
- Schools are committed to creating positive, connected school communities and implementing good practices form part of this commitment. With regard to parent payments, this includes consideration of how payments to parents/carers are set, clearly communicating how decisions are made and recognising that some families experiencing hardship may need additional consideration and support. Schools will establish clear expectations and provide supports that promote inclusion and strengthen partnerships with parents/carers and the school community to continue improving student outcomes, wellbeing and engagement.
- 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.
- 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 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.
- The Education and Training Reform Act 2016 provides for instruction in the standard curriculum program to be free for all students in government schools. School Councils are responsible for developing and approving school-level payment charges and can request payments from parents/carers 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 ALTONA P9 COLLEGE DOES NOT REQUEST THIS**
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.
- Each school determines whether an item, activity or service is an Essential Student Learning Item or an Optional Item within the context of their distinct learning and teaching program. Good governance practice will ensure School Councils consider and are able to communicate the rationale for the classification of items, activities or services, requested and charged according to the three categories.

Purpose

- To ensure that parent payment practices at Altona P-9 College are consistent with other schools, transparent and that all children have access to the standard curriculum.
- To ensure school-level parent payment policies and processes are compliant with the DET's policy requirements.
- To ensure the school complies with the legislative requirements of the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*.

Definitions

Under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006, in relation to a child, "parent" 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.

Essential Student Learning Items

These are items, activities or services that the school deems essential to student learning in the standard curriculum. Where practical and appropriate, parents may choose to purchase items through the school or provide their own. Examples are:

- items that the student takes temporary or permanent possession of such as text books, student stationery, book bags, Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS)
- materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished articles (e.g. technology projects, workbooks, photography ceramics, painting, food)
- school uniform (where applicable)
- activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend such as cost associated with excursions and work placements

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

Optional Items

These are items or services that are **optional** and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum. Students may access these on a user pays basis. These items include:

- activities the student purchases (e.g. fees for extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum such as instrumental music tuition; fees for guest speakers; optional camps and excursions; entry fees to school-based performances, productions and events)

- items the student purchases or hires (e.g. school magazines; class photos; formals/graduation functions; materials for extracurricular activities; student accident insurance)
- items and materials that are more expensive than required to meet the standard curriculum (e.g. use of silver in metal work instead of copper)

Voluntary Financial Contributions ALTONA P9 COLLEGE DOES NOT REQUEST THIS

Parents/carers, or anyone else, can be invited to make a donation to the school for the following purposes:

- contributions for a specific purpose identified by the school (e.g. equipment, materials or services) in addition to those funded through the SRP. This may include additional computers or student-related services and are NOT tax deductible
- general voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school and are NOT tax deductible
- donations to a building trust fund or contributions to a library trust fund (these trust funds are approved by the Australian Taxation Office, have a Deductible Gift Recipients (DGR) status and are tax deductible to the donor)

Curriculum

The standard curriculum for Years Foundation - 10 means the implementation of the Victorian Curriculum Foundation - 10.

The standard curriculum for senior secondary schools means a program that enables a student to be awarded a VCE or VCAL qualification.

Implementation

- **The school will use the mandatory [Parent Payment Policy and Implementation Template](#) when developing the school's parent payment arrangements.** This will ensure the school can customise the implementation of the policy to the local context whilst retaining all information in the policy template, thereby facilitating consistent implementation of key practices across schools.
- As required by DET, the school will adhere to the following principles:
 - **Educational value:** Student learning, aspirations and wellbeing will be paramount in determining parent payments practices
 - **Access, equity and inclusion:** All students will have access to the standard curriculum program and participation of all students to the full school program will be facilitated
 - **Affordability:** Cost to parents/carers will be kept to a minimum and be affordable for most families at the school
 - **Engagement and Support:** Early identification and engagement strategies to ensure parents are well informed of the payment options and supports available for those experiencing hardship
 - **Respect and Confidentiality:** Parents/carers and students experiencing hardship will be treated with respect, dignity, sensitivity and without judgement and the identity and personal information of all parents/carers and students will be kept confidential in respect to parent payments
 - **Transparency and Accountability:** School parent payment practices will be well communicated, clear and transparent and their impact on student programs and families will be reviewed by the School Council
- Students will not be denied access to the standard curriculum program, be refused instruction or disadvantaged on the basis of payments not being made for education items or services.
- Where a child cannot participate in an essential activity or provide an essential student learning item, the school will consider the financial hardship circumstances of the student and make alternative arrangements that provides for the required knowledge and skills to be learned. This ensures that all children and young people learn the required content necessary to meet the achievement standards in the standard curriculum program.
- It is essential that when the School Council considers the proposed requests for parent payment that cost is kept to a minimum and is affordable. The Principal will ensure that:

- the school does not withhold access to enrolment or advancement to the next year level as a condition of payment for any of the three categories
- items students consume or take possession of are accurately costed
- payment requests for goods, services and other items provided by the school to students are broadly itemised within the appropriate category (see: parent payment categories above)
- parents are advised that they have the option of purchasing equivalent Essential Student Learning items themselves (A LIST IS KEPT IN THE OFFICE), in consultation with the school. This does not include activities set by the school
- the school ensures information on payment options is available, accessible and easily understood by parents/carers, ensuring they know what to expect and what supports they can access-PARENTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO CONTACT THE PRINCIPAL OR BUSINESS MANAGER TO MAKE SUITABLE ARRANGEMENTS.
- the status and details of any financial arrangements are kept confidential and shared only with relevant school personnel
- payment may be requested but not required prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used
- parents are provided with early notice of annual payment requests for school fees, that is, a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous school year which enables parents to plan and budget accordingly
- parents are provided with reasonable notice for any other payment requests that arise during the school year, ensuring that parents have a clear understanding of the full financial contribution being sought
- parents experiencing hardship will not be pursued for outstanding school payments from one year to the next
- the use of debt collectors of any type to obtain any outstanding funds owed to the school from parents is not permitted
- The Principal and School Council are aware of, and will exercise sensitivity to the differing financial cultural or social circumstances of individual students. This will extend to the provision of interpreting and translations services where this would be helpful. If necessary the free interpreting and translation services available through DET to support schools in communicating written and verbal information in languages other than English will be made utilised.
- The school acknowledges the range of support options available. These can be accessed through [“Cost support for families”](#) and include
 - access to State Schools' Relief support via the Principal to assist with uniforms, shoes, textbooks, and stationery
 - the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, which is available for eligible families, to cover the costs of school trips, camps and sporting activities
 - welfare and support agencies that have established partnership arrangements with schools to provide further assistance to students and their families.

Support Options for Families

Where parents have difficulty providing or paying the school to provide essential student learning items, the Principal will support parents to make an appointment to discuss with them alternative payment methods.

Every effort will be made to support students and families experiencing difficulty with payments.

Responding to Parental Hardship

The school has a commitment and responsibility to take a **pro-active approach** and to be responsive to parents who may be experiencing either short term or long term hardship and are unable to make the requested payments. This includes offering options which support and assist those parents and early identification and engagement strategies to ensure parents are well informed of the payment options and linked with available supports when experiencing hardship.

Consideration of hardship arrangements and concessions are provided to families experiencing long term financial hardship or short-term crisis on a confidential, case-by-case basis. Consideration will be given to the impact on the student and any determination must ensure that outcomes for the student are kept at the forefront of decision-making. This approach provides for an individualised, family-centred and student outcomes focus that necessarily requires thoughtful consideration of each situation.

A proactive approach is taken in providing hardship support. The school has early identification and engagement strategies to ensure parents are well-informed of the payment options. Teachers will often be the first to detect signs of family stress and/or hardship from students. A clear process for guiding teachers to follow-up and provide the necessary support and information to students and parents will be well communicated to them by the School Leadership Team.

All parents/carers will be provided with the name and contact details (phone number and email address) of a nominated Parent Payment Contact Person.

Altona P-9 College has nominated Wendy Jennings Business Manager to fulfil this role.

Parents will be assured that their child/children will have access to the educational opportunities being offered by the school.

The Parent Payment Contact Person undertaking this function will do so with sensitivity, respect and understanding to ensure she/he is responsive to families' needs.

It is not acceptable to use coercion or harass parents/carers to obtain payment.

The Contact Person has authority to use their discretion within the mandate of the policy and guiding principles to agree on the appropriate forms of support and assistance. These options may include, but are not restricted to:

- waiving of fees
- reduced fees
- deferred payment or the extension of payment deadlines
- flexible payment plans
- cost saving options such as substituting one item for another, second-hand options e.g. uniforms, text books, resources, stationery, using resources that can be loaned from the school
- referral to government and/or community assistance programs

When discussing payment and support options with parents, the Parent Payment Contact Person is required by DET to:

- allow parents to be accompanied by a support person or community advocate if they choose to do so
- explain to parents that the learning and teaching program builds on the free instruction in the standard curriculum and outline how parent payments support educational outcomes
- outline that the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* empowers school councils to charge fees to parents for goods and services made available or provided by the school to a child of the parent (section 2.3.6(c))
- assure parents that their children will be supported to participate in learning activities regardless of the family's inability to pay
- enable parents to nominate a payment and/or schedule they can afford
- provide information on the supports available, including government assistance programs, legal and/or financial counselling and assistance from local community and welfare organisations and refer parents where applicable
- abide by the hardship policy principles in the practice and delivery of hardship support to families
- abide by principles of good practice in this policy

The Parent Payment Contact Person is expected to be aware of and inform families of any second-hand options available for materials and resources commonly required by students, e.g. uniforms, textbooks, calculators and stationery, and encourage and explore ways to make quality second-hand books and uniforms available to parents in need.

The school will strongly consider placing the [clk2sell State Schools' Relief Smartphone App](#) - on their website where it is easy to find.

The school will assess where there may be barriers to learning and participation for students on the basis of financial hardship. The DET aims to assist schools to ensure their activities and procedures are sensitive to low income families. Also, the  [Low Income Awareness Checklist for Schools \(docx - 69.48kb\)](#) has been developed by Good Shepherd to help schools assess where there may be barriers to learning and participation for students from low income families. The school will strongly consider using these tools to help them implement a fair, consistent and transparent process for assessing hardship and increase educational access more broadly.

Guidance for schools in better understanding and responding to family hardship is provided at:  [Supporting families experiencing hardship \(docx - 76.01kb\)](#).

Administrative Processes

- The Principal and School Council are responsible for approving parent payments.
- The school will ensure that initial payment requests and letters to parents for student materials and services charges are accompanied by the following information:
 - a description of each of the three parent payment categories
 - the materials and activities that parents are being asked to pay for
 - that parents are expected to provide Essential Student Learning Items for their children, and have the option of purchasing these through the school or through a local supplier, where appropriate
 - the availability of alternative payment options and an invitation to contact the Principal or nominated Parent Payment Contact Person, if the parent wishes to discuss the payments further
 - a copy or link to the Parent Payment Policy and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).
- The Principal as Executive Officer of School Council, will ensure that the school-level policy complies with the DET's policy and that all staff are familiar with and adhere to it.
- The school will ensure that:
 - administrative and financial processes are compliant with Departmental requirements such as CASES 21 financial reporting.
 - prior to generating reminder notices to parents for unpaid items, discretion should be exercised with families where there may be hardship or financial difficulty
 - invoices for unpaid essential student learning items or optional items accepted by parents are generated and distributed on a regular basis, but not more than once a month.
 - only the initial invitation for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice per year is sent to all parents/carers
 - receipts are issued to parents/carers immediately upon payment and receipted on CASES 21.
- All documentation relating to individual parent/carer payments will be kept confidential and in a secure location. It will be accessible only to the Principal, Business Manager and other nominated staff.
- If in doubt, for the most frequently asked questions, the Principal will refer to DET's website [Frequently Asked Questions](#) and other resources such as [Costs and Financial Assistance, Finance](#).
- In the event of a parent complaint, the school will refer to the *Complaints, Parents Policy*.
- Please refer also to the *Personal Devices – Parent Payments Policy* and the *Financial Management Policy* and to other links on the DET website below.

Evaluation

- As part of the Department's and each school's commitment to ongoing improvement, and ensuring that the impact of policies and practices on students are assessed in an ongoing way, implementation of the Parent Payment Policy and school practice must be reviewed as follows:

- School Councils have a key role in ensuring the school level approach to parent payments reflects the shared expectations of the whole school community and is therefore responsible for monitoring effectiveness and impact on parents and students.
- The Department will undertake regular audits for compliance with the Parent Payment Policy.

REFUNDS

No refunds will be available for term fees as all items charged are consumable or parents take possession of them. Eg. Ebooks, subscriptions, art, wood etc. items are purchased in advance and paid for by the school. If a child leaves the school the child has ordered and used the items.

No refunds will be available for camps or excursions after family has made a commitment to camp or excursion and changes their mind. Deposits and confirmed commitments have been made to companies which in turn dictates overall costs to students.

- This policy will be reviewed at least annually (or if guidelines change) as part of its ongoing improvement and report back to the school community (latest DET update early December 2016).

This update was ratified by School Council in February, 2016 and March 2017

Reference:

www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/pages/parentpayments.aspx