

# Warrnambool College

## PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

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### 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 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, Warrnambool College adheres 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. Please refer to the Payment arrangements and methods section below
- 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. Our Warrnambool College Principals, Business Manager and school council 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. Our written hardship arrangements that include a proactive approach to providing support for parents experiencing financial difficulty are detailed below.

Here parents will find the name and contact details of nominated parent payment contact staff at Warrnambool College who parents can discuss confidential payment arrangements with.

## **ENGAGING WITH PARENTS**

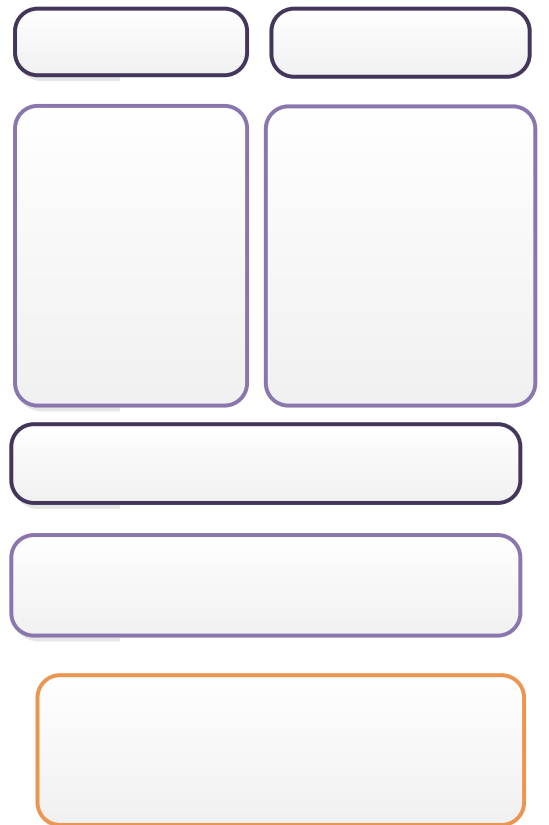
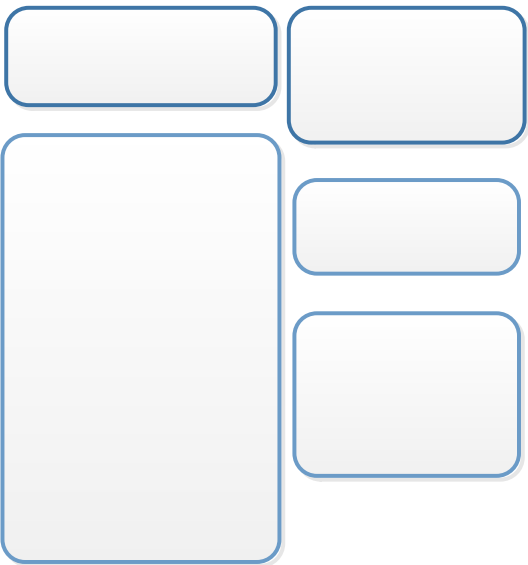
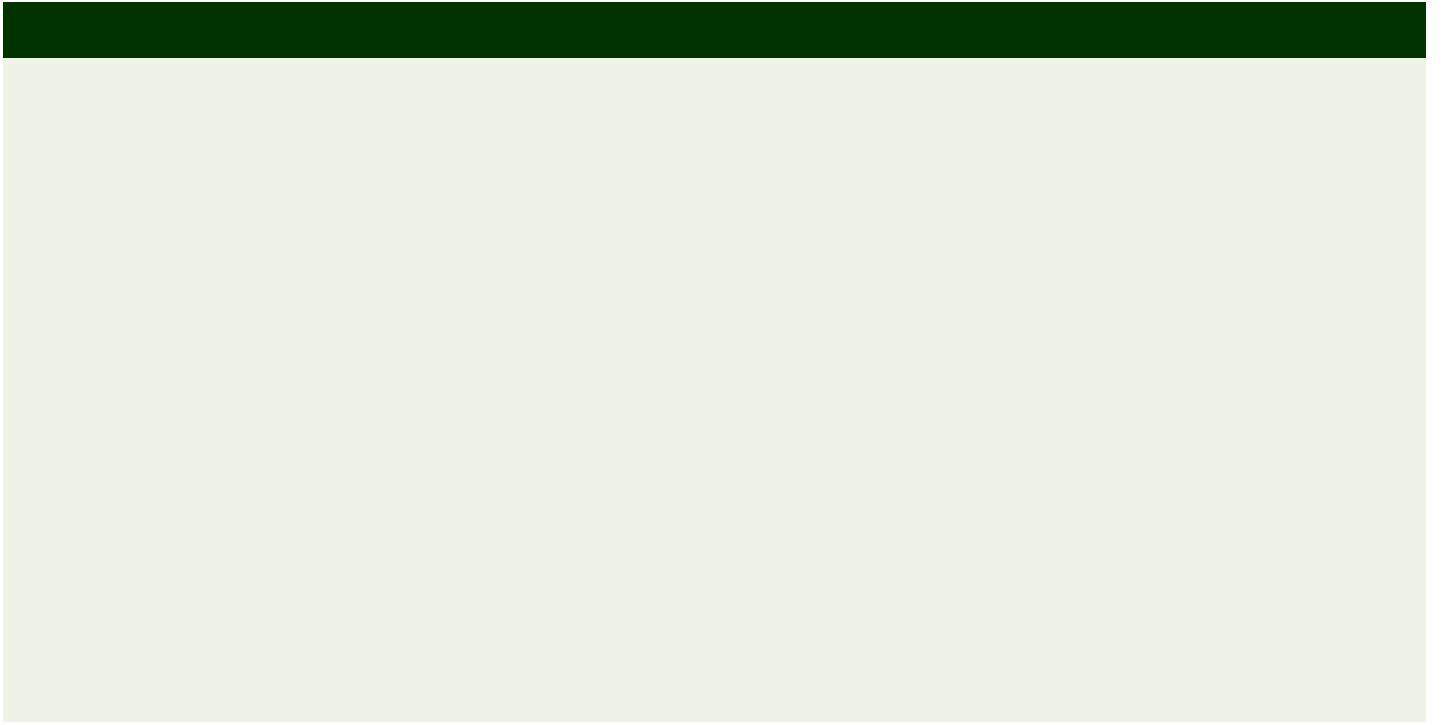
In respect to the development of the Warrnambool College parent payments, school council will engage in effective communication with the school community and have strategies in place to ensure they are aware of and understand the needs and views of parents.

## **REVIEW OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

Warrnambool College Council 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 Parent](#)



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### PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

Locally raised funds add significantly to the school's ability to provide a diverse and high quality curriculum. Warrnambool College School Council has the responsibility to carefully consider the resources available each year and set the charges to cover the provision of the areas that are the parents' responsibility. College Council members are to keep the costs to parents to a minimum and not exceed the cost of the relevant materials and service to the students.

Aim:

- To provide a diverse range of high quality learning opportunities for all students in line with the College Strategic Plan and school priorities
- School Council seeks to supplement resources from the Department of Education with a variety of locally raised funds, including subject charges and voluntary levies

### PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

Parents will be provided with early notice of requests for payment of essential, optional and voluntary contributions (a minimum of 6 weeks prior to the commencement of the school year.) Reasonable notice will be given for any other payment requests during the year (ie: camps/excursions).

Parents will be invited to make payments in a variety of ways. Options include:

- Compass, taking advantage of our 6 month repayment plan
- B/Pay
- Eftpos, cash or cheque directly to the College Office

Payment requests, letters or CASES21 invoices for student materials and services charges will be accompanied by the following information:

- Parent/guardians are required to provide essential education items for their students, and they have the option of purchasing these through the school or through a local supplier, where appropriate
- Details of how payments or contributions will be spent by the school
- A copy of the school policy is available upon request, and in booklist material
- Payment requests or letters to parents to clearly identify which category the items fall into i.e. essential education items, optional education items or voluntary financial contributions.

Coercion or harassment of parents and guardians to obtain payment will not be tolerated.

Students wishing to participate in extra curricula activities such as camps, excursion trips, dinners, instrumental music etc. must meet the full cost of the activity and be up to date with all payments before the student participates, alternatively the student may be removed from the program.

### FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

There are a range of support options available for parents experiencing difficulty in paying for essential items including:

- The Schoolkids Bonus which is provided by Centrelink to help with education costs and is automatically paid in January and July to eligible families and students
- Access to State Schools Relief Committee support via the Chaplain to assist with uniforms/footwear/calculators/textbooks
- Welfare and support agencies that have established partnership arrangements with schools to provide further assistance to students and their families
- Second hand uniforms are available from Dobson's uniform shop
- Camps, Sports & Excursions Funding (CSEF) and the Dairy Farmer Support grants are available for eligible families
- Local community supports via our Wellbeing Team or Business Manager

Families are invited to enter into confidential payment arrangements by contacting the Business Manager (Mrs. Chris Dickson) on 5564 4444.

## **CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP**

Warrnambool College understands families may experience financial difficulties or hardship at times and may be unable to meet full or part payment requests. Families are invited to contact the Business Manager or senior administrative staff to make payment arrangements or for a confidential discussion and information regarding support options. Contact is invited by phone, email and in person.

The Business Manager also actively seeks feedback from teaching staff to proactively identify any students who may not have access to uniforms, books, iPads etc. Discrete contact is then followed up with the family by either the Business Manager or Wellbeing staff to ascertain their need for support.

## **COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES**

This policy will be available on the College website, with the link provided to all families in the booklist pack.

A breakdown of College charges at each year level are also provided to all families in the College booklist materials.

General enquiries regarding parent charges may be made to the College on 5564 4444. Concerns should be directed to the Business Manager.

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

Warrnambool College school council (via the Finance Committee) will monitor the implementation of the policy, identify the factors/measures to be taken into account, such as transparency of processes and engagement with parents and how/when it will be reported back to the school community.

This policy will be reviewed annually, addressing any concerns raised by the school community.

**Date of approval by School Council**