

# Parent Payments in Victorian Government Schools

## Frequently Asked Questions for Parents

The Department's new Parent Payment Policy brings a stronger focus to transparency and family hardship, as well as outlining the expectations of implementation and communication with parents. The policy also emphasises that all children should have access to the standard curriculum regardless of their parents' ability to pay.

The following frequently asked questions provide further details about the types of payments schools can request from families.

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### **I THOUGHT PUBLIC EDUCATION IS FREE. WHY HAVE I BEEN ASKED TO PAY?**

Schools are funded to deliver a quality education based on the standard curriculum. Schools receive additional government funds based on the needs of the students or location.

Parent payments are a valuable contribution to enhancing and enriching the educational experience. These payments allow schools to offer enhanced programs and opportunities which their school communities expect them to offer.

Schools decide on the learning program they offer based on the needs and aspirations of the school community.

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### **SOME PARENTS BELIEVE THAT PUBLIC EDUCATION IS FREE. WHAT IS FREE IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS?**

**Victorian legislation clearly states that instruction in the standard curriculum program must be provided free of charge to all students in Victorian government schools.**

This 'free instruction' is the teaching staff, administration and the provision of facilities in connection with instruction of the standard curriculum program, including reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities.

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### **WHAT IS THE STANDARD CURRICULUM PROGRAM?**

The standard curriculum program is made up of the eight key learning areas agreed to by the States, Territories and Commonwealth. These areas are: English, Mathematics, Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, the Arts, Languages, Health and Physical Education, and Technologies.

The standard curriculum also includes the four capability areas: Critical and Creative Thinking, Intercultural, Ethical, and Personal and Social.

To clarify, 'the standard curriculum for years F-10' means the 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.

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### **DOES FREE INSTRUCTION STILL APPLY TO SENIOR SECONDARY CERTIFICATES SUCH AS VCE AND VCAL INCLUDING VET IN SCHOOLS PROGRAMS?**

Yes. Free instruction applies to senior secondary certificates as the standard curriculum program includes certificates such as VCE and VCAL. VET in Schools programs are part of VCE and VCAL and therefore instruction is free. Costs that could be considered supports, resources, administration or school facilities required to deliver instruction in the standard curriculum, cannot be charged for.

If the student consumes or takes temporary or permanent possession of an item/service which supports the free instruction in the standard curriculum program, this is an Essential Student Learning Item for which payment may be sought.

This includes the purchase of materials for a VET program such as wood for making a standard/agreed item in VET furnishing.

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### WHY CAN SCHOOLS SET THEIR OWN PAYMENTS?

The Act allows school councils to set their own payments in accordance with Department of Education and Training policy.

Schools serve different communities with different needs and expectations for the curriculum and are able to request payments to cover costs for their learning programs.

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### WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO PAY FOR DIFFERENT THINGS TO PARENTS IN OTHER SCHOOLS?

Every school is different and each school has the ability to set its own priorities. Therefore, it is common for schools to request different payments from parents because they offer different programs, go on different excursions and have different needs at school. For example, some might want to start a student gardening program and others a photography program.

Schools make parent payment contribution decisions in good faith and in the best interests of their students. They aim to keep costs to a minimum so that they are reasonable and affordable to most parents at the school. In setting their fees, each school ensures that parents understand the links between the school's learning programs and the payments being requested.

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### CAN I BE CHARGED FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE STANDARD CURRICULUM PROGRAM?

No. The costs associated with the administration and coordination of the standard curriculum program are considered part of free instruction and must not be passed onto parents.

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### WHAT CAN SCHOOLS REQUEST PARENTS TO PAY FOR?

You can be asked to pay for Essential Student Learning Items that the school deems essential to student learning in the standard curriculum including:

These items include:

- **items which students take temporary or permanent possession of**, including text books, student stationery and school uniforms (where applicable)

- materials for learning and teaching where students **construct, consume or take possession of the finished articles** (for example, home economics, ceramics, photography, materials for build-your-own-kits)
- **activities that all students** are expected to attend (for example, transport and entrance costs).

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### HOW ARE THE ESSENTIAL STUDENT LEARNING ITEMS PURCHASED?

Schools will offer to purchase these items on behalf of parents, although parents have the option of purchasing equivalent materials from other sources.

If you choose to provide equivalent materials, this should be done in consultation with the school, and should meet the specifications provided by the school. Some items, for example food provisions for home economics, may only be provided by the school.

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### WHAT ARE THE OPTIONAL ITEMS?

Optional items are items or services that are offered in addition to the standard curriculum.

These items are provided on a user-pays basis and if parents choose to access them for their child they will be required to pay for them.

These items include:

- **items the student purchases or hires** such as school magazines, class photos, fees for guest speakers, functions, formals and student accident insurance
- **activities the student purchases** such as fees for extra-curricular programs or activities such as instrumental music tuition
- **items and materials that are more expensive** than required to meet the standard curriculum (for example, requesting payment for the use of mahogany in woodwork instead of the standard pine).

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## WHAT ARE VOLUNTARY FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS?

Schools may invite voluntary financial contributions for the following.

- Contributions to a **building or a library fund**. These are contributions that have been endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office as Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) are tax deductible.
- Contributions for a specific purpose identified by the school: for example, equipment, materials or services in addition to those funded through the Student Resource Package. This may include additional computers or student-related services.
- general voluntary contributions.

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## CAN A SCHOOL MAKE REPEATED REQUESTS FOR VOLUNTARY FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS?

No. Requests for voluntary financial contributions are limited to the initial notice to all parents and guardians and one reminder notice only.

Prior to sending out any reminder notices to parents, schools use their discretion with families where there may be financial difficulty or hardship.

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## I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE CHARGES THAT I AM BEING ASKED TO PAY FOR?

You should discuss the charges with the parent payment contact person who will be able to explain them to you.

If you are still not clear or not happy with the outcome of your conversation with the parent payment contact person, you should contact the school Principal.

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## CAN MY CHILD BE DENIED ACCESS TO THE STANDARD CURRICULUM PROGRAM ON THE BASIS OF ME NOT PAYING THESE CHARGES?

No, all students must have **access to the standard curriculum program** as inclusion and engagement are integral to school policy.

Schools apply the Department of Education and Training policy that ensures students are not treated

differently, denied access to the 'standard curriculum program', or refused instruction on the basis of payments not being made.

Principals must ensure any record of payments or contributions is kept confidential. Only de-identified information can be provided for reporting purposes.

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## DO I HAVE TO PAY FOR OPTIONAL SCHOOL CAMPS OR EXCURSIONS?

If your child's school deems a camp or excursion is optional, it is not part of the standard curriculum program and you will need to pay the excursion costs if your child is to attend. Schools may charge parents for all costs of an optional camp or excursion, including the cost of transport, food, entry fees and accommodation for their child and any teacher(s) attending the optional camp or excursion.

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## WHAT MAY I BE ASKED TO PAY FOR IF A CAMP OR EXCURSION IS PART OF THE STANDARD CURRICULUM PROGRAM?

If your child's school deems a camp or excursion is part of the standard curriculum program, with all students expected to attend, you cannot be charged for any costs of the camp or excursion that fall under free instruction. Free instruction is the teaching staff, administration and provision of school facilities in connection with the instruction of the standard curriculum program (including reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities).

However, you can be charged for costs of the camp or excursion that do not fall under free instruction. For example, parents may be charged for their child's food, transport, accommodation and entry fees. These costs are Essential Student Learning Items under the Department's Parent Payment Policy.

If you do not make payments associated with essential excursions, the school must consider any financial hardship circumstances you have raised with the school in this context, or make alternative arrangements to ensure your child has the opportunity to learn the required knowledge and skills.

If you might have difficulty making payments, you should discuss support available with your school's parent payment contact person.

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## CAN I BE CHARGED FOR SWIMMING AND WATER SAFETY PROGRAMS?

Swimming and water safety is part of the Health and Physical Education learning area in the Victorian Curriculum F-10. Swimming and water safety programs in schools incorporate both in-water practical components and in-class theory components. Parents cannot be charged for instruction in these programs.

Schools can charge for pool entry and transport as Essential Student Learning Items under the Department's Parent Payment Policy.

If you do not make payments associated with swimming programs, the school must consider any financial hardship circumstances you have raised with the school in this context, and ensure that your child has the opportunity to learn the required knowledge and skills. If you might have difficulty making payments, you should discuss support available with your school's parent payment contact person.

The **Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund** is available for eligible students and can be used for swimming and water safety programs. See:

- [Camps, Sports and Excursion Fund](#)

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## WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE TO HELP ME PAY THESE CHARGES?

A range of support options are available, including:

- Access to **State Schools' Relief Committee** support for clothing/uniforms (via the principal).
- The **Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund**, which provides payments for eligible students to attend camps, sports and excursions.

For more information about support options, see: [Financial Assistance for Families](#)

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## WHO CAN I TALK TO IF I AM HAVING FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY AND UNABLE TO PAY THE CHARGES?

All schools understand that families can experience financial difficulty or a crisis which makes the payment difficult.

Your school has a parent payment contact person who you can discuss your situation with and help with making alternate payment arrangements. The name and contact details of the parent payment contact people is available in the school's Parent Payment Policy and Procedures.

You should be able to find this easily on the school's website. Contact the school if you are unable to find this policy.

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## Personal Devices

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### MY CHILD'S SCHOOL HAS A PROGRAM WHERE PARENTS PAY FOR LAPTOP COMPUTERS OR TABLETS. DO I HAVE TO PURCHASE/LEASE THE DEVICE SPECIFIED BY THE SCHOOL?

No. Your school will have information about its use of laptop computers/tablets which you can ask about. It is the parents' choice whether they purchase/lease these items or not.

If you do not purchase/lease the device, the school will provide a device for your child during the times the device is required at school.

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### MY CHILD ALREADY HAS A LAPTOP COMPUTER/TABLET. CAN HE/SHE USE THIS AT SCHOOL INSTEAD OF PURCHASING THE ONE(S) THE SCHOOL IS SPECIFYING?

Yes, your school will have information on the types of devices that can connect to the school network.

Generally, if you already have a device at home that is similar and suitable you may be able to use it at school. The school must allow your child to use their own device. However, parents should be aware that it will not always be practical or possible to connect a device that is not the one specified by the school.

While the school should provide some technical assistance to allow the device to be connected to the EduSTAR wireless network, the amount of technical support that can be provided by the school is limited.

The other consideration is that it may not be possible to install required software for licencing reasons and parents may need to organise their own purchase of the software.

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**I WOULD LIKE TO PURCHASE/LEASE THE LAPTOP COMPUTER/TABLET OFFERED BY THE SCHOOL BUT IT IS TOO EXPENSIVE. WHAT CAN I DO?**

All schools offering programs where parents pay for the costs of their child's device will ensure they have support options available for parents who may have difficulties paying for the devices. These options should include offering payment plans and subsidised devices.

If you are experiencing difficulties in providing or paying the school to provide the digital device, you are encouraged to make an appointment with the Principal or other nominated senior staff member to discuss assistance the school can provide.

All information you provide will be treated in the strictest confidence.

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**IF I CHOOSE NOT TO PURCHASE OR PROVIDE THE LAPTOP COMPUTER SPECIFIED BY THE SCHOOL FOR MY CHILD, WILL THEY MISS OUT AT SCHOOL?**

If parents choose not to purchase/lease the device, the school will provide a device for the child during the times the device is required at school.

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**I DON'T AGREE WITH STUDENTS HAVING THEIR OWN COMPUTING DEVICES FOR SCHOOL. I AM CONCERNED THAT MY CHILD ALREADY HAS TOO MUCH SCREEN TIME AND THIS SHOULD BE CUT DOWN, NOT INCREASED.**

The discerning use of digital technologies in the classroom can maximise learning opportunities. Students learn how to engage with the world around them, connect, collaborate, access information and acquire digital skills to participate in life and work. Personal devices are important learning tools. Research shows that there are many benefits to your child having a personal device. A sense of ownership creates a greater connection to using the device for learning, and students can learn anywhere and at any time in a way that suits their needs.

School councils must approve the parent provision, purchase or lease of networked personal devices (such as laptop computers or tablets). Schools are required to consult with and seek out the views of their school communities when introducing such programs. If you have issues with this sort of program you should raise your concerns with your school principal or school council.

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**MORE INFORMATION**

For more information, see: [Parent Payment Policy](#) - detailing the Department's policy.

For information specific to your child's school contact the school directly or contact your regional office, see: [Regional Offices](#)