

# PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

## Mildura Senior College

2019 Parent Payment Policy

### 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<sup>1</sup> 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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<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.

## 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](#)

# Understanding Parent Payment Categories

## Schools

### What does the legislation say?

The Education and Training Reform Act (2006) provides for free instruction in the standard curriculum program to all students in government schools. The Act also empowers school councils to charge fees to parents for goods and services provided by the school to a child.

In the Act, a 'Parent' includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for a child including parental responsibility under the Commonwealth Family Law Act 1975 and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

### What do schools pay for as part of 'free instruction'?



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 for Years F-10 means 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.

### What principles govern parent payment practice?

Educational Value | Access, Equity & Inclusion | Affordability

Engagement & Support | Respect & Confidentiality | Transparency & Accountability

## Parents

### What may parents be asked to pay for?

#### Schools can request payment for Essential Student Learning Items



These are items, activities or services that the school deems **essential** to student learning of the standard curriculum.

Where practical and appropriate, parents may choose to purchase items through the school or provide their own.

These may also be either:

#### Items the student takes temporary or permanent possession of

- e.g.
  - textbooks, activity books, exercise books
  - stationery, book bags
  - student ID cards, locks
  - cooking ingredients students will consume
  - materials for final products that students take home (technology projects, build-your-own kits, dioramas)
  - Picture Exchange Communication Systems

#### Activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend

i.e. travel, entry fees or accommodation

- e.g.
  - excursions
  - incursions
  - school sports
  - work placements

Parents can be asked to pay for items, activities and services in the three Parent Payment Categories:

Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions.

Schools determine how items, activities and services are classified within these categories based on the learning and teaching program of their school.

#### Schools can request payment for Optional Items

These are items, activities or services that are **optional** and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum.

Students may access these on a user-pays basis.

These may be either:

#### Items the student purchases or hires

- e.g.
  - school magazines, class photos
  - functions, formals, graduation dinners
  - materials for extra curricular programs
  - student accident insurance

#### Activities the student purchases

- e.g.
  - fees for extra curricular programs or activities, such as instrumental music tuition
  - fees for guest speakers
  - camps, excursions, incursions, sports
  - entry fees for school run performances

#### Items and/or materials that are more expensive than required to meet the standard curriculum

- e.g.
  - use of silver in metal work instead of copper
  - supplementary exam revision guides

Support for families experiencing hardship is available at every school and each school has a parent payment contact person. See your school's policy for more information.

Schools can invite Voluntary Financial Contributions



- e.g.
  - Building or Library fund (Tax deductible)
  - Voluntary contributions for a specific purpose.

# Mildura Senior College

## Parent Payment Policy

### PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

- Mildura Senior Colleges aims to minimise the cost incurred by families, however, to enrich and support the educational experience some subject fees are required. In most cases these fees are to ensure a broad range of activities to strengthen the learning and understanding of students both within and outside of classrooms.
- The 2019 Family Fees Schedule identifies all College Council approved fees. The schedule provides specification, description, costs and payment categories of each.
- Students are to source their own stationery requirements and a recommended stationery list is provided to all students upon enrolment.
- Students are to source their own text books. Mildura Senior College has a partnership with Collins Books as a supplier of text books. Required text books will be advised at enrolment and should be ordered with Collins Books as per the arrangements and by the date on the booklist. Books can be paid for and collected from the college in January (or as otherwise advised). Payments for new text books are made directly to the supplier – Collins Books Mildura. The college cannot make special arrangements for texts as they are the commercial property of Collins Books. Lay-by arrangements can be made with Collins Books prior to collection however full payment must be made prior to collection.

### PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

#### Payment methods

Payments can be made by BPAY, EFTPOS, cheque, cash and Centrepay. Families will receive a statement of amounts owing before the end of January. Payments should be made to the college on the allocated dates in January as part of the text book collection process.

Additionally, Payment plans and camps/sports activities costs can also be paid for *via* the Compass Parent Portal via a debit/credit card.

Receipts will be issued immediately upon making payment.

#### Payment arrangements

##### *Instalment payment plan arrangements*

The college appreciates that there can sometimes be financial difficulties experienced by parents and guardians in meeting requests for payments and contributions. A range of support options and flexible payment options are available to assist parents and guardians in this regard; application can be made to the college for a suitable fee payment arrangement.

##### **Kits**

Kits may be paid for on instalment plans, but students will not be able to take possession of the required kits until a minimum of 50% payment has been received.

##### **Camps & excursion payments**

Camps' and excursions' costs are to be approved by College Council as early as practical to ensure an adequate notice for parents to make payments or to arrange appropriate payment plans. (Mildura Senior College tries to ensure a notice period of a minimum of six weeks' prior to the activity). Previous years activity fees are listed on the schedule to allow parents to plan and arrange if appropriate payment plans.

## **FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS**

### ***Second hand book sales***

MSC administers a second hand book program that allows students to sell or buy second hand books to assist to meet parents and guardians costs of their children's education. The college operates a second-hand book sale in the first week of December. Parents and guardians can also make private arrangements for the selling and purchase of second hand text books.

### **CSEF**

CSEF will be provided by the Victorian Government to assist eligible families cover the costs of school trips, camps and sporting activities. If you hold a valid means-tested concession card or are a temporary foster parent, you may be eligible for CSEF. A special consideration category also exists for asylum seeker and refugee families.

The allowance is paid to the school to use towards expenses relating to camps, excursions or sporting activities for the benefit of your child.

School camps provide children with inspiring experiences in the great outdoors, excursions encourage a deeper understanding of how the world works and sport teaches teamwork and discipline and encourages leadership. All are part of a healthy balanced curriculum.

The annual CSEF amount per student is:

- \$125 for primary school students
- \$225 for secondary school students.

Contact the school office to obtain a CSEF application form or download the form from [www.education.vic.gov.au/csef](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/csef)

Applications must be received by the College's office by 3 March 2018 because payments are made from March. However, the college will be able to accept and process applications up until the end of term two each year.

### **State Schools Relief**

State Schools' Relief works closely with all government schools across Victoria. Assistance with school items such as uniforms, shoes and other essential items is provided to families.

State Schools' Relief only responds to requests from schools. Parents are encouraged to talk to our Leading Teacher - Wellbeing or our Youth Worker to access your students' needs and eligibility for assistance.

For more information go to: [www.ssr.net.au/schools](http://www.ssr.net.au/schools).

### **Chances for Children**

Chances for Children is a fund set up and operated to remove financial barriers for children and young people in the Mallee to achieve their potential. Chances is a locally based fund, established by the local community, and supported both financially and in kind by local individuals and businesses.

There is no set criteria to determine the amount of funding awarded; each is decided on a case by case basis considering the specific needs of each applicant in relation to their financial and social circumstances

Each application made to Chances for Children is assessed on its individual merits.

Eligibility criteria and application forms are available from [www.chancesforchildren.com.au](http://www.chancesforchildren.com.au) and are to be completed in collaboration with the college's Leading teacher - Wellbeing or our Youth Worker. All applications to Chances for Children must provide evidence that all other avenues of funding have been explored and exhausted. All applications are treated as strictly confidential

## **CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP**

No student will be treated differently at Mildura Senior College or denied access to facilities or activities or refused instruction to the standard curriculum program for not making financial contributions in the event of financial hardship.

Mildura Senior College has three Parent Payment Contact Officers; Business Manager, Wellbeing Leading Teacher or Student Wellbeing Coordinator.

Parents and students experiencing hardship can contact either our Business Manager, Wellbeing Leading Teacher or Student Wellbeing Coordinator by phone, email or in person about their financial situation and related difficulties in making payments.

Financial support provided by the college will be dependent on the individual circumstances of the financial situation put forward; support may be, but not limited to; extension of payment plans to be completed after an event, kit ownership prior to payment, activity attendance prior to payment, referral to external family support options such as State Schools Relief or Chance for Children. Further options are listed on the DET Parent Payment Policy website.

In extreme hardship the Principal may waive the contribution.

**Note:** In reflecting on the college's hardship arrangements, Mildura Senior College staff may proactively engage with parents disconnected from the school who may be experiencing hardship, such as discretely approaching families who may need support and special payment arrangements to ensure students are able to participate in all activities.

## **COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES**

- The Parent Payment Policy, Fee Schedule, Stationery & Text Book Lists will be provided to all students upon enrolment. These documents, along with the Parents Refund Policy and Sports Participation Policy, are available from the college's office or the college's website [www.milsen.vic.edu.au](http://www.milsen.vic.edu.au).
- Parents are encouraged to make general inquiries about the fees and levies at the college's office, alternatively the college's Business Manager is available for any issues or feedback in regard to fees and payments.
- Unresolved grievances in the first instance are to be lodged for consideration in writing to the Principal (or their delegate) who must respond within 1 week from when the grievance is received. If the grievance remains unresolved then the family may make further appeal to the Mildura Senior College Council.

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

- Mildura Senior College Council has a key role in ensuring the 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.
- Mildura Senior College Council *will annually review the policy to ensure the transparency of processes of how fees are determined within the college and how this policy is communicated to parents.*
- Prior to commencement of the each school year the council will review the Parent Payment Policy and approve recommended fees for the following school year. These approved fees will be provided to the parents upon enrolment. Main enrolment at Mildura Senior College occurs in mid November. Students enrolling after this time are provided the policy and schedule upon enrolment. The first applicable whole school communication at the commencement of the school year will report to the school community of the process for approval of the policy and fees.

**Date of approval by Mildura Senior College Council**

**12 November 2018**