



# South Gippsland Specialist School

## PARENT PAYMENT POLICY

### **Purpose:**

To ensure that parent payment practices are consistent, transparent and ensure that all children have access to the standard curriculum.

### **Scope:**

This policy applies to all families/carers of South Gippsland Specialist School.

### **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**

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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.

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:

### **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.

## Policy:

### Parent Payment Charges 2019

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>2</sup> under three categories only- Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions.

- **essential education items** which parents/guardians pay the school to provide or may provide themselves, if appropriate (for example, stationery, text books and excursions (travel and entry costs));
- **optional education items** which are offered on a user-pays basis and which parents/guardians may **choose** whether their child accesses or participates in (for example, school magazines or extracurricular programs or activities); and
- **voluntary financial contributions** which parents/guardians may be invited to donate to the school.

The school’s learning and teaching program is enhanced by the parent payment charges being requested as the parent payments are specifically utilised to support improved outcomes for students.

Essential Items for the South Gippsland Specialist School curriculum are:

Cost of travel for local community access	\$2 per student per session
Cost of travel for non-local community access	\$7 per student per session
Food consumed in the Kitchen/Garden program	\$5 per student per session
Use of the pool for swimming	\$5 per student per session

Optional educational Items for the South Gippsland Specialist School Curriculum are:

Subsidized camps program costs.	Costs vary depending on activity and number of nights
Graduation Afternoon Tea	\$15 per head for drinks and food
Horse Riding Program	\$15 per student per session
Cost of entry or admission to excursion	Costs vary depending on price

<sup>2</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.

**All parents/carers: Please note that School Council have decided that in 2019, they will be implementing the following:**

**If parents do not pay for the optional extras then the student does not go on the specialized program.**

If any parents/carers would like to discuss this decision, please contact the following school council members:

President: Tenielle Bentley – [tsbentley@bigpond.com](mailto:tsbentley@bigpond.com)

Vice President: Sam Banks – [sambanks1201@bigpond.com](mailto:sambanks1201@bigpond.com)

### **Payment arrangements and methods**

- **Internet Banking** - using BPAY or Direct Deposit
- **Centrepay** – is a voluntary bill paying service which is free for Centrepay customers. You can use Centrepay to pay bills and ongoing expenses such as educational fees from your Centrelink payments.
- **EFT** – the school has a portable EFT machine at the office
- **Payment Plans** – parents can opt to make weekly, monthly, termly or yearly payments.

Please contact our Business Manager for information on payment methods.

### **FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS**

#### **STATE GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS**

- **CSEF – Camps, Sport & Excursion Fund.** Families holding a valid means-tested concession card or temporary foster parents are eligible to apply. \$125 per year is paid for eligible primary school students, with \$225 per year paid for eligible secondary school students. A special consideration eligibility category also exists. Payments are made directly to the school and are tied to the student.
- **State Schools Relief** - State Schools' Relief only responds to requests from schools and not from parents. The school will then make a request to State Schools' Relief on your behalf. Talk to the student welfare coordinator, Michelle Ward about the possibility of getting uniforms, shoes, books and stationery through the State Schools' Relief. Eligibility criteria required to be met.

#### **COMMONWEALTH FAMILY ASSISTANCE**

*The Commonwealth Government provides a range of payments and services to help families look after their children's health, education and other family issues.*

- **Child Care Benefit** - helps eligible families with the cost of outside school hours care, vacation care and registered care. For more information about eligibility and making claims, see Centrelink.
- **Family Tax Benefits A and B** -The Commonwealth Government provides a range of payments and services to help families look after their children's education, health care and other family issues.
- **Disability Support Pension** - Students 16 + are on the Disability Support Pension and get a Pensioner Education Supplement to support their schooling costs.
- **Health Care Card** - provides help with the with the cost of prescription medicine under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, Commonwealth-funded medical services, and access to state, territory and local government concessions. Families may be eligible for a Health Care Card if they receive specific Commonwealth payments or supplements or the maximum rate of Family Tax Benefit A.
- **Centrepay** - is a free, voluntary service for Centrelink customers to pay expenses as regular deductions from their Centrelink payments. Centrepay can help families to pay for many types of bills, such as education fees and expenses, child care, rent, electricity, gas and water bills, or medical services.

References:

## COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE - INFORMATION SERVICES

- **Crisis Referral Information System (CRIS) Online Directory** provides a broad range of information for people seeking welfare assistance, advice and general referral and support. The online directory contains comprehensive information on services and organisations such as those providing support in respect to accommodation, domestic violence, drug & alcohol treatment, health, material aid and mental health.
- **Community Information and Support Victoria (CISVic)** is the peak body representing local community information and support services. Its member agencies assist people experiencing personal and financial difficulties by providing information, referral and support services including emergency relief.
- **Emergency Relief (ER) Victoria** is the peak body for the Victorian emergency relief sector, with over 100 member organisations offering material aid and support to families experiencing a financial crisis or emergency.
- **Financial Counselling Victoria (FCV)** is a non-profit organisation providing financial counselling through advocacy and information to disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the community. FCV can provide advice over the phone, email or in person and can assist with referrals to other community and government support such as legal advice, material aid, and emergency relief.

## COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

- ***School Breakfast clubs*** - *School Breakfast clubs run throughout Victoria either by the school community or in collaboration with a non-government organisation. While **Foodbank** has established the School Breakfast Clubs program for 250 of Victoria's most disadvantaged schools with Victorian Government support, other organisations such as the **Australian Red Cross** and **Ardoch Youth Foundation** also assist schools to source donations to run School Breakfast programs.*
- ***Saver Plus*** is an initiative of Brotherhood of St Laurence and ANZ, delivered locally by community organisations in 22 locations in Victoria. Saver Plus assists individuals and families on lower incomes to have every dollar up to \$500 saved over a 10-month period matched by ANZ to go towards education-related costs.
- ***The Smith Family's 'Learning for Life program'*** provides financial support, guidance and mentoring for disadvantaged students. The Smith Family works with a select number of schools and may require referral from the school principal.
- ***Travellers Aid Australia's Pathways to Education program*** provides student travel passes to young people experiencing financial difficulties, enabling them to travel to school or other forms of training and education. The program is limited to students who attend secondary education in an alternative setting, namely community schools and secondary education at a tertiary institution.
- ***A Start in Life*** is an Australian charity based in New South Wales that provides assistance to disadvantaged students from kindergarten through to tertiary studies.
- ***Good Shepherd Microfinance*** provides affordable financial programs for people on low or limited incomes that may assist families to afford educational costs and other expenses. The **No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS)** provides access to fair and safe credit (up to \$1,200) for the purchase of essential goods and services delivered through a network of local community organisations in 650 locations across Australia, including through Financial Counselling Victoria and Travellers Aid.

### **Consideration of hardship**

Hardship refers to an inability to pay due to financial difficulty or circumstance.

Hardship can arise from a variety of situations that can be either short or long term. Hardship is not necessarily related to the income of the family but can result from contributing stressors which can impact a family's ability to make financial payments.

Hardship can be experienced as a result of a sudden change in circumstances which leads to temporary financial difficulty; as a result of a low and/or fixed income which leads to ongoing financial difficulty; or from a combination of low income and an unanticipated change in circumstances.

While some families may require flexibility and temporary assistance, such as an extension of time to pay or flexible payment arrangements, other families may not expect their situation to improve in the foreseeable future and will instead require ongoing support over a longer period.

There are also a number of circumstances that can impact a family's ability to pay student fees. In either the short or long term, such circumstances can include, but are not limited to:

- Death of an immediate family member or friend
- Family breakdown or severe family disruption e.g. divorce/separation of parents; substance dependence and addiction
- Illness, including serious long term illness or mental illness of the parent or family member
- Family violence
- Homelessness, at risk of homelessness or impacted by transitional housing
- Out-of-home care arrangements or temporary foster parents
- Loss of employment
- Financial stress resulting in difficulty paying the bills, providing food or meeting essential costs, such as medical or transport costs.
- Natural disaster such as drought, bushfire or flood
- Refugee status, including families on a Bridging Visa, Temporary Protection Visa, community detention and asylum seeker families
- Other factors resulting in unforeseen change in the parent's capacity to make payments, whether through a reduction in income or through an increase in non-discretionary expenditure

If you are experiencing hardship, either short term or long term, please contact any of the following staff to discuss your situation:

1. Heather Braden – Principal
2. Adrian Darakai – Welfare Officer
3. Jodie Lennon – Business Manager

Contact with any of the above staff can be any of the following:

1. Phone contact: 56624496
2. Email contact: School email is [south.gippsland.ss@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:south.gippsland.ss@edumail.vic.gov.au)
3. Arrange an appointment to discuss your situation.

### **Communication with families**

The Parent Payment Policy will be communicated to the school community via a number of mediums.

1. Hard Copy sent home at the end of each year
2. Electronically placed on the Schools Website
3. Each term an article will be put in the school newsletter discussing the policy and the payment options families have for making financial contributions.

4. Invoices will be sent once a term only

If any Families would like further clarification on any of the sections discussed in this policy or want to make general enquiries about the charges please contact either Heather Braden, Principal, or Jodie Lennon, Business Manager.

**Evaluation:**

The Parent Payment Policy and Fees will be reviewed by School Council in the November meeting of every year to ensure that costings are accurate and a true reflection of the essential items students are consuming in their curriculum. School Council will endeavour to keep costs as minimal as possible without sacrificing the engaging curriculum that helps our students to achieve their goals to become engaging members of the community. School Council seeks parent feedback on school fees, the parent payment process and the school communities expectation on reasonable expenses related to our school's specialised curriculum.

This policy was ratified in school council in November 2018 and will be reviewed in 2019.