

## Cobden Technical 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.

### 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, Cobden Technical School 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 support is 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. The Cobden Technical School Principal, Business Manager and School Council will 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 Cobden Technical School who they can discuss payment arrangements with.

### **ENGAGING WITH PARENTS**

In respect to the development of the Cobden Technical School 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**

Cobden Technical School 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](#)

# 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

#### 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

## PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

Locally raised funds add significantly to the school's ability to provide a diverse and high quality curriculum. Cobden Technical 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. School 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 School Strategic Plan and school priorities
- School Council needs to supplement resources from the Department of Education with a variety of locally raised funds, including subject charges and 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 (camps/excursions).

Parents will be invited to make payments in a variety of ways. Options include: eftpos, direct deposit, cash or cheque directly to the General Office.

Information regarding student materials and services charges will be provided with the school booklist.

Parents/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 on the school website.

Payment requests to parents will clearly identify which category the items fall into i.e. essential educational items, optional education items or voluntary financial contributions.

## FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

- *Second hand and low cost options for school books and uniforms*
- *Camps, Sports & Excursions Funding (CSEF) is available for eligible families*
- *State Schools Relief requests submitted by the Business Manager*
- *Local community support requests via the Business Manager ie Rotary, Quota*
- *Families who experience difficulty may be referred to the Business Manager to make confidential payment arrangements.*

## **CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP**

Cobden Technical School 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 to make payment arrangements or for a confidential discussion and information regarding support options. Contact is invited by phone, email and in person.

Staff provide feedback to the Welfare Committee and Business Manager to identify any students who may not have access to uniforms, books etc. The Business Manager or member of the wellbeing team will contact the family to ascertain their need for support.

## **COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES**

This policy will be available on the school website, with the link provided to all families on the booklist. The booklist has a breakdown of charges for each year level. General enquires regarding parent charges may be made to the school office on 55951202. Concerns should be directed to the Business Manager.

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

Cobden Technical School Council (Finance Committee) will monitor the implementation of the policy, identify the factors/measure 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**                      **(Insert Date)**