PARENT PAYMENTS POLICY

RATIONALE
The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 provides for the provision of free instruction in the standard curriculum program, and empowers school councils to charge fees for goods and services used in the course of instruction and to raise funds.

Instruction in the standard curriculum program is provided free to all students in Victorian government schools. Free instruction includes learning and teaching, instructional supports, materials and resources, administration and facilities associated with the provision of the standard curriculum program.

The standard curriculum program encompasses the core learning and teaching activities associated with the Australian / Victorian Essential Learning Standards (AusVELS). The standard curriculum package covers all the materials that are used as part of the standard curriculum taught in all Victorian Government schools. They include such things as library books, physical education equipment and teaching and learning materials for the core subjects.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Parent Payments in Victorian Government Schools policy provides advice on the different types of payments that schools can request from parents and outlines the procedures and protocols schools must adhere to. This policy is available from the Department’s School Policy and Advisory Guide (www.education.vic.gov.au/spag).

1 GUIDELINES
School councils are able to request payments or contributions for education items and services from parents and guardians for students in Victorian government schools in the three categories – essential education items, optional education items and voluntary financial contributions.

These payments fall into three categories:

1. Essential education items are those items or services which parents and guardians pay the school to provide for their child (e.g. stationery, text books, learning resources and materials).

2. Optional education items (or non-essential materials and services) are those that are provided in addition to the standard curriculum program, and which are offered to all students. These optional extras are provided on a user-pays basis and if parents and guardians choose to access them for students, they will be required to pay for them (e.g. school magazines, extra curricular programs or activities).

3. Voluntary financial contributions are for those items and services that parents or guardians are invited to make a donation to the school (e.g. grounds maintenance, a library or building trust).
2 IMPLEMENTATION

The school-level policy on essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions should ensure that:

- parents and guardians are provided with early notice of requests for payment of essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions. A minimum of six weeks notice prior to the end of the previous school year should be given to allow parents and guardians sufficient planning time. Payment may be requested but not required prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used
- items that students consume or take possession of are accurately costed
- administrative and financial processes are compliant with Departmental requirements such as CASES 21 financial reporting
- receipts must be issued to parents immediately upon payment
- the school does not withhold access to enrolment or advancement to the next year level as a condition of payment of essential education items, optional extras or voluntary financial contributions
- the status and details of any payments or non-payments by parents and guardians are confidential.
- students are not treated differently, denied access to the standard curriculum program, or refused instruction on the basis of payments not being made for education items, services or voluntary financial contributions
- all students have access to the standard curriculum program
- invoices for unpaid essential education items or optional items accepted by parents are generated and distributed on a regular basis, but not more than once a month
- only the initial invitation for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice is sent to all parents and guardians
- under no circumstances can collectors of any type, including debt collectors, be used by schools to obtain any funds from parents and guardians.

Principals must ensure any record of payments or contributions by parents and guardians is kept confidential.

Principals must exercise sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of individual students and their families. Where families have difficulty making payments, principals are expected to discuss the range of support options available, and to negotiate an appropriate alternative arrangement, such as payment by instalments.

Parents and guardians who experience difficulties providing or paying the school to provide essential education items are encouraged to make an appointment with the principal or other nominated senior staff member to discuss alternative payment methods.

3 EVALUATION

This policy will be evaluated in line with School Council cyclical review of policy documents, school and DEECD priorities.

Ratified by School Council: November 2014