BACCHUS MARSH PRIMARY SCHOOL

PARENT PAYMENTS

POLICY

* Essential Educational Items
* Optional Extras
* Voluntary Financial Contributions

Reviewed By The School Council

December 2015
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1. **Introduction**

This policy provides information for the Bacchus Marsh Primary School Council regarding parent payments within the school. The policy covers payments for essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions that the school may request, and the parameters, terms and conditions within which these requests may be made.

2. **Context**

The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 ensures the provision of free instruction in the standard curriculum program, and empowers School Councils to charge for goods and services used in the course of instruction and to raise funds.

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 includes core learning and teaching activities associated with the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) and senior secondary certificates (VCE and VCAL, including VET programs).

The Department of Education and Training (DET) provides funding to schools through the Student Resource Package (SRP) and various programs. This includes funding for the standard curriculum program and associated education items, equipment and operational costs which are an integral part of the SRP.

The Bacchus Marsh Primary School Council has the responsibility to develop policy and plans to allocate their overall resources – human, financial and physical – in accordance with the goals, targets and strategies outlined in our strategic plan. This includes the allocation of funding provided under the SRP, any other funding provided by DET and locally-raised funds.

3. **Categories of Parent Payments**

In summary, the Bacchus Marsh Primary School Council can request payments from parents for student materials and services charges, and for voluntary financial contributions. These payments fall into three categories:

1. essential education items which parents and guardians are required to provide or pay the school to provide for their child (e.g. stationery and text books where required),
2. optional extras which are offered on a user-pays basis and which parents and guardians may choose whether their child accesses or participates in (e.g. school magazines, extra-curricular programs or activities),
3. voluntary financial contributions which parents and guardians may be invited to donate to the school (e.g. grounds beautification, additional computers).

More details on these categories are provided in sections 5 and 6 below.
4. Requirements of the School Council and Principal

School-level Policy

The School Council is responsible for the development of this school-level policy which covers essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions. This school-level policy meets the community’s expectations and will be made available to parents and guardians. This school-level policy keeps parent payments to a minimum and must not exceed the cost of the relevant materials or services to the student.

The Principal, as the Executive Officer of the School Council, must ensure that the school-level policy complies with the requirements of this D.E.T. policy.

Implementation and Administration

The Principal is responsible for the implementation and administration of this school-level policy developed by the School Council. This includes ensuring that the school-level policy is communicated within the school and that all staff are familiar with and adhere to it.

This school-level policy on essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions will:

• ensure 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 will 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,
• ensure items that students consume or take possession of are accurately costed,
• ensure administrative and financial processes are compliant with Departmental requirements such as CASES 21 financial reporting,
• 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 (see also section 8 below on payment arrangements and non-payment) and
• ensure that the status and details of any payments or non-payments by parents and guardians are kept confidential.

Communication With Parents

This school-level policy will ensure that all communication with parents about education items, including requests for payment, is fair and reasonable. Payment requests, letters or CASES 21 invoices for student materials and services charges will be accompanied by the following information:

• the need for parent/guardians to provide essential education items for their students, and the fact they have the option of purchasing these through the school or through a local supplier, where appropriate,
• a clear description of each of the three parent payment categories,
• the availability of alternative payment options and an invitation to contact the Principal if the parent wishes to discuss these,
• that payment is accepted by either cash, cheque, credit card, debit card, Bpay or via Qkr,
• details of how payments or contributions will be spent by the school and
• a copy of the school-level policy.

Payment requests or letters to parents will be itemised and the category each item falls under will be clearly identified as an essential educational item, optional educational item or voluntary financial contribution.

Receipts will be issued to parents immediately upon making payment.

The School Council will issue only one request for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice.

The School Council notes that it is not acceptable to use coercion or to harass parents and guardians to obtain payment.

5. **Essential Education Items and Optional Extras**

The Bacchus Marsh Primary School Council may request payments for two types of essential education items or optional extras used in the course of instruction, as detailed below.

Parents and guardians will be given the option of purchasing equivalent materials from other sources. If parents and guardians choose to provide equivalent materials, this should be done in consultation with the school and items should meet the specifications provided by the school. However, there are some items (e.g. specialized readers) which, due to their nature, may only be provided by the school as part of the book packs. Book packs will not be split to provide only those items not otherwise available.

Where the Principal or the Bacchus Marsh Primary School Council is uncertain as to whether parents and guardians can reasonably be expected to pay for an education item or service, advice will be sought from the D.E.T. South Western Victoria Regional Office.

*Essential Education Items*

Essential education items are those items used in the course of instruction in the standard curriculum program that parents and guardians are responsible for and may choose to either provide or pay the school to provide.

These items include:

• materials that the individual student takes possession of, including text books and student stationery,
• materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finalised articles (e.g. visual and performing arts materials) and
• essential services associated with, but not considered to be a part of, instruction in the standard curriculum program, such as costs associated with camps and excursions which all students are encouraged to attend (e.g. transport and entrance costs).
Optional Extras

Optional extras (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.

These items include:

- instructional support material, resources and administration beyond the provision of the standard curriculum program (e.g. student computer printing for personal use and internet access for recreational or non-school use),
- extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. instrumental music tuition),
- school-based performances, productions and events,
- materials for subjects where the payment sought is the difference between the basic materials/services required for access to the standard curriculum program and higher cost alternatives which may be more desirable (e.g. the use of more expensive materials),
- materials and services offered in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. school magazines) and
- school facilities and equipment not associated with provision of the standard curriculum program, and not otherwise provided for through the SRP (e.g. student accident insurance, and hire or lease of equipment such as musical instruments).

Voluntary Financial Contributions

The Bacchus Marsh Primary School Council may invite parents and guardians of a student enrolled at the school, or anyone else, to make a donation in the form of a voluntary financial contribution to the school. The School Council may invite voluntary financial contributions for the following purposes:

- contributions to a building and grounds beautification fund or contributions to a library fund (these trust funds are approved by the Australian Taxation Office and are tax deductible)
- contributions for a specific purpose identified by the school (e.g. equipment, materials or services) in addition to those funded through the SRP. This may include additional computers or student-related services and
- general voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school.

Section 4 above outlines specific communication requirements which apply to voluntary financial contributions.

Where the Principal or the School Council is uncertain if a particular voluntary financial contribution can reasonably be invited from parents and guardians, they will seek advice from the D.E.T. South Western Victoria Regional Office.
6. Support Options

At Bacchus Marsh Primary School, parents who have difficulty paying for essential items can access a range of support options including:

• For those on Healthcare or Pension Cards, Centrepay enables a set amount to be deducted from weekly / fortnightly Centrelink payments and sent to the school to assist parents and guardians of students in meeting the costs of sending their child to school. Centrepay provides financial assistance to families for expenditure on school and sporting uniforms, school bags, books and related expenses. For more information, parents and guardians should see http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/centrepay
• Access to State Schools Relief Committee support via the Principal to assist with clothing/uniforms and
• Welfare and support agencies that have established partnership arrangements with schools to provide further assistance to students and their families. The school should be contacted for more information.

The Principal will exercise sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of individual students and their families. The Principal is encouraged to make decisions about how to manage non-payment of essential education items or optional extras on a case-by-case basis.

Where families have difficulty making payments, the Principal is expected to discuss the range of support options available, and to negotiate an appropriate alternative arrangement, such as payment by instalments.

The Principal is encouraged to explore ways to make quality second-hand books and uniforms available to parents in need.

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

7. Payment Arrangements and Non-Payment

This school-level policy ensures that:

• 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,
• parents and guardians are provided with an alternative option for their children if they choose not to participate in an excursion or camp,
• 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,
• administrative and financial processes are compliant with Departmental requirements such as CASES 21 financial reporting,
• receipts will be issued to parents immediately upon request,
• only the initial invitation for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice is sent to all parents and guardians and
• under no circumstances will collectors of any type, including debt collectors, be used by the school to obtain any funds from parents and guardians.

The Principal will ensure any record of payments or contributions by parents and guardians is kept confidential. The School Council recognises the public identification of students or their parents and guardians who have or have not made a payment or financial contribution is unacceptable and must not occur in any circumstances.

8. Further D.E.T. Information and Resources

The Department’s South Western Victoria Regional Office can provide additional advice to the School Council and Principal as required. Additional information and support is also available from the following websites:

• further information and support for schools and School Councils regarding the implementation of this policy is available at: http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/Pages/parentpayments.aspx
• the School Council is encouraged to access the support materials available at: http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/governance/Pages/councils.aspx and

Parent Payments in Victorian Government Schools – Summary of Requirements

The Bacchus Marsh Primary School Council is responsible for developing a school-level policy which covers essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions. This policy must meet the community’s expectations and be available to parents and guardians. The school-level policy must keep parent payments to a minimum and must not exceed the cost of the relevant materials or services to the student.

The Principal, as Executive Officer of the School Council, will ensure that the school-level policy complies with the requirements of this D.E.T. policy and is communicated within the school and that staff adhere to the requirements.

Essential Education Items and Optional Extras

The School Principal will ensure that:

• all students have access to the standard curriculum program,
• parents and guardians are provided with early notice of requests for payment of essential education items and optional extras,
• the status and details of any payments or non-payments by parents and guardians are kept confidential,
• parents are informed of alternative payment options and invited to contact the Principal if the parent wishes to discuss these options,
• details of how payments will be spent are provided by the school,
payment requests or letters to parents clearly identify whether the items are essential education items or optional extras and all requests for payment are fair and reasonable.

**Voluntary Financial Contributions**

The School Council may invite voluntary financial contributions for:

- a building and grounds beautification fund or contributions to a library fund (these funds are approved by the Australian Taxation Office and are tax deductible),
- a specific purpose identified by the school (e.g. equipment, materials or services such as additional computers) in addition to those funded through the SRP and donations or general voluntary financial contributions to the school.

The School Council and Principal will clearly identify that this is a voluntary financial contribution and can only be requested once, with one reminder.

For any of these parent payments or voluntary financial contributions, the School Council will not:

- insist on payment prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used,
- 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,
- issue more than one request for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice,
- coerce or harass parents and guardians to obtain payment,
- send invoices for unpaid essential education items or optional items accepted by parents more than once a month and
- under any circumstances use collectors of any type, including debt collectors, to obtain any funds from parents and guardians.

**9. Policy Review**

This policy will fall in line with all other policies at Bacchus Marsh Primary School and will be reviewed on a 3 year cycle.

The next review of the policy will be in November 2018.

**10. Adoption**

This policy was adopted at the December 2015 meeting of the Bacchus Marsh Primary School Council.