



FINANCIAL HARDSHIP POLICY



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy, please contact the school office.

PURPOSE

To provide opportunities for students of families experiencing financial hardship to participate in the full breadth of educational experiences that are available to all students.

DEFINITIONS

Long Term Hardship

A standard means of determining longer term financial hardship is the possession of a valid means-tested concession card and/or the receipt of Centrelink benefits or allowances. The Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund (CSEF) uses this criteria for eligibility. The CSEF application criteria and closing dates will be advertised in the school newsletter.

Short Term Hardship And Contributing Stressors

There are also a number of circumstances that can impact a family's ability to pay student fees.

For parents willing to contribute but limited in their ability to, the parent payment contact person(s) will use their discretion and act within the mandate of the policy and guiding principles to negotiate appropriate forms of payment assistance.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Communication of Payment Requests:

- The Parent Payment Policy and Parent Payment Arrangements will be reviewed annually with emphasis on the school priorities, resources and value for money.
- School Council supplements Department of Education and Training funds by requesting payments from parents for the following voluntary items:-
 - **Curriculum Contributions** which parents and guardians are required to provide or pay the school to provide eg: stationary booklists
 - **Other Contributions** which are non-compulsory donations for specific projects eg: building fund, grounds projects, technologies or equipment.
 - **Optional Extras** which are offered on a user pays basis and parents can choose whether or not their child participates eg: camps and excursions etc.
- Parents will be made aware of the costs associated with all voluntary parent payments six weeks prior to the due date along with a recommended payments schedule where possible.



- The parent payments arrangements will include itemised details relating to all payments, an option to purchase goods elsewhere (where appropriate), options to make payments by instalments, optional payment methods, clear definitions of the category of any payments (ie: Curriculum contributions, Other contributions or Optional extras)
- Parents will be made aware of any financial support schemes (eg: the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund - CSEF), and payments may be aligned with these benefits plus advice to parents to contact the principal if they require support or additional information.
- Council will provide opportunities for all parents experiencing financial difficulties to enter into alternative and confidential payment arrangements with the Business Manager or Principal. The following line will appear in all permission notices where a cost is associated with an activity: 'If you are experiencing financial hardship please discuss payment options with the Business Manager or Principal.'
- Payment plans for higher cost optional items such as camps and swimming programs will be available commencing at least 2 months prior to the event.
- Costs for excursions and incursions will be notified at least two weeks prior to the event.

Access to opportunities:

- No student will be treated differently, denied access or refused instruction to the standard curriculum program for not making a payment or voluntary contribution.

Assessment of Parental Hardship:

- Hardship arrangements will be considered for families who are experiencing chronic long term financial hardship or short term crises on a case-by-case basis. To ensure the approach taken provides for a family-centred focus that is individualised.
- Parents experiencing hardship are encourage to liaise with the school Principal as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements regarding parent payments. Parents are welcome to have a support person assist them with the process. Parents will be treated with respect, dignity, sensitivity and without judgement.
- All payments and non-payments by families, and participants in any school financial support programs will be strictly confidential.

Assistance for families:

- Staff will be proactive in identifying families who may be experiencing hardship and in communicating this information to the Principal.
- School Council has an annual discretionary budget that the Principal may use to assist families experiencing financial hardship to participate in optional extras.
- Where possible, and on the authority of the Principal, Gembrook Primary School may offer to reduce the cost or alter the timelines of requested parent payments for families experiencing hardship. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Waiving fees



- Reduced fees
- Deferred payment or the extension of payment deadlines
- Flexible payment options
- Families will be informed of cost support programs that they may choose to access. This includes government assistance programs, community information and Commonwealth family assistance services. Examples include:
 - The Camps, Sports and Excursions fund (CSEF) available to applicants holding a means tested concession card and temporary foster parents.
 - State Schools Relief for support with uniform needs
 - A second-hand school uniform program

EVVALUATION:

There is an annual budget amount and process available from school funds to support Gembrook Primary School students whose families are experiencing hardship to participate in all educational activities.

This policy will be reviewed annually in conjunction with the Parent Payment Policy.

REFERENCES:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/financial-help-families/policy>

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/parent-payment/policy>

Policy last reviewed	29th March 2023
Consultation	School Council
Approved by	School Council
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