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## ST PATRICK'S PRIMARY SCHOOL

### School Fees and Remission Policy

#### Policy Background

Catholic social teaching and tradition echoes the Gospel imperative of a "preferential option for the poor". It is the practice of St Patrick's to find a place for families who support the Catholic identity and education system.

St Patrick's aims to provide a quality education to all students and in order for this to be achieved, fees and levies are charged to the parents of students enrolled at the school, but in doing so must try to ensure that no family is precluded from a Catholic education on the basis of financial capacity. The School must ensure that there are clear and transparent processes with respect to fees and fee remissions.

#### St Patrick Primary School's Policy

St Patrick's Primary School is committed to providing a Catholic education to all families that want it for their children, and that financial capacity does not preclude those families from achieving it.

It is our policy that there are clear processes for:

- the setting and administration of school fees at St Patrick's;
- ensuring access to a Catholic education to those families who are eligible for enrolment (refer to the **Enrolment Policy**), but who, from time to time, are unable to meet the fee requirements because of financial hardship;
- ensuring that fee remissions are granted appropriately and consistently so they support those with genuine financial hardship, and allow these parents/carers to maintain their dignity; and
- the collection of fees where they remain unpaid outside of the agreed terms.

#### Definitions

Family hardship	when a family is willing, but unable, to meet their contractual fee obligations. It is assessed on an individual basis.
Parent	an adult with a parenting role (including parents, guardians, step-parents, grandparents, extended family, carers).
Parental responsibility	means a person who has responsibility for a child or young person where: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• they are either a parent, step-parent (by marriage or defacto relationship) or a legal guardian of all the relevant children; or</li> <li>• a court order is in force in relation to a child/ren in their favour, which supports their application; or</li> <li>• family circumstances mean that a child's natural parent is unable to take responsibility for a child and the child is now being cared for by them.</li> </ul>
School fee remission	an arrangement whereby a parent is not required to pay the full amount of fees levied. This is available to families with significant financial hardship who would otherwise be unable to afford to send their children to a Catholic school.

## Provisions

### *General Principles*

- No family that supports the Catholic identity shall be denied a place at St Patrick's because of an inability (as opposed to an unwillingness) to pay full fees.
- St Patrick's is accessible to all families willing to support the Catholic identity regardless of their personal, financial and pastoral circumstances.
- St Patrick's has a responsibility to ensure that school fees are set to reflect the financial responsibilities of the school, and balance those against our families' ability to pay school fees.
- St Patrick's has the responsibility for the financial management of the school, and consequently is responsible for the collection of school fees.
- State and Federal government grants provide a portion of the funding required to operate Catholic schools in Victoria. The balance of operational costs are paid from school fees collected from families.
- Where families have the capacity to pay fees, the collection of school fees shall be actively pursued.
- Where families have the capacity to pay fees, but are experiencing temporary cash flow problems, St Patrick's may decide to accept reduced payments over longer periods.
- The collection of school fees shall be approached in the spirit of Christian charity and justice.
- The School Principal, in association with the Parish Priest, and using the general guidelines outlined in this policy, should be attentive to the need to support those families that may require financial assistance.
- The provision of School Fee Remissions should be at the discretion of the School Principal and/or Parish Priest, based on a pastoral interview and application form including supporting information to assess financial hardship.
- An inability to pay is not self-assessing and as such this policy attempts to provide a consistent approach to School Fee Remissions.
- It is recognised that families make choices and priorities in regards to their standard of living, investments, education and extra-curricular activities. This policy considers that families who have chosen a Catholic education consider it important and that fee payments will be prioritised accordingly.
- Pastoral consideration shall be provided where extenuating circumstances exist for a family, such as extensive medical treatment costs, humanitarian entrant and refugee families.
- A family arrangement for school fee purposes is deemed to exist where an adult with parental responsibility has signed all enrolment forms and is responsible for the payment of school fees. Where a child may be considered to be part of two or more family structures, the child's fees will be considered to be part of the family who is responsible for the payment of fees.
- St Patrick's shall protect the confidentiality of all information pertaining to families and the payment of school fees.

### *School Fees*

#### Enrolment/Application Fee

St Patrick's does not charge an application or enrolment fee or deposit.

#### Setting of school fees

The level of fees charged is a fine balance between the needs of the school and the capacity of the families to pay.

The annual increase will be considered with due consideration given to the Consumer Price Index, advice from Catholic Education Melbourne and other influencing factors at the time.

The School Principal will work with the school accountant to determine a budget for the following calendar year and seek to minimise any increase in school fees.

Any increase in school fees will then be tabled with the School Advisory Board for comment and discussion and parental feedback.

The final decision on school fees for a calendar year will be rest with the School Principal and Parish Priest.

#### School fee structure

School fees are structured into two components: a family component, and a per student component.

The family component is charged as a single amount per family and comprises the following charges:

- Tuition fee; and
- Capital fee.

The per student component is charged for each student and comprises the following charges:

- Book and subject fees;
- ICT fee;
- Excursion fees;
- Camp fees (for Years 4 to 6); and
- Sacrament fees (for Years 3, 4 and 6).

School fees includes the costs of all items and resources including classroom stationery, photocopying, art and craft items, science materials, general class resources, as well as covering the costs of incursions and excursions.

School fees do not include the cost of the back to school requisite list, uniforms, personal stationery, backpacks and optional programs such as onsite instrumental music lessons and school photos.

#### Accounts and payment

##### Issuing of accounts

School fees and levies are charged at the beginning of each school year, usually within the first two weeks of school, in accordance with the School Fees and Charges listing.

The total school fees invoiced are generally payable in three payments at the beginning of Terms 1, 2 and 3, with no payment due in Term 4 (if the account is fully paid).

##### Methods of payment

The school offers a number of payment options, including:

- Regular direct debit;
- Direct credit into the school bank account;
- Cheque made payment to "St Patrick's Primary School"; and
- Cash at the school finance office.

##### Payment plans

St Patrick's offers families the opportunity of paying the school fee account by regular instalments over the course of the school year. All payment plans must address the school fee account so that the account is cleared in full by the end of the school year, or as negotiated with the Business Manager.

#### Overdue accounts

Families who can afford to pay fees are expected to make the required contribution for the education of their child/ren, recognising that the failure to pay school fees creates a burden for the remainder of the school community.

A reminder notice (school fee statement) shall be issued to all families who have not settled the school fee account by the due date (unless a payment place is in place).

If an account is not able to be paid by the due date, any family experiencing such difficulties should contact the Business Manager to negotiate an alternative payment plan (refer above).

Discussion around unpaid fees does not involve the child/ren, and the privacy of the family will be protected.

Every effort will be made by St Patrick's to make contact with any family with an overdue account and to negotiate a payment plan that is in line with the family's current financial situation. This will include contact via telephone and letter. Should a family fail to respond to these contacts and to negotiate a payment plan to address the school fee account, St Patrick's shall look to alternative measures to recover the debt.

In the event that additional recovery action needs to be taken, it will be done so sensitively.

The decision to take legal action may ultimately be made, especially in cases where it is understood that the family can pay but is unwilling to do so.

#### Students entering or leaving during a school year

New students entering St Patrick's after the commencement of a school term, will be charged on a pro-rata basis for the remaining weeks of that term.

Students exiting the school after the commencement of a term will be charged on a pro-rata basis for the number of weeks attended during the term.

Exiting families must settle any outstanding fees before the last day of

attendance.

#### Refunds

Refunds are not given for non-attendance of school events, such as excursions.

Refunds on pre-paid events such as camps are not automatic. Refunds will be considered for sickness or injury on a case-by-case basis and will be dependent on whether the school is able to recoup the costs from the suppliers so as to not put the school out of pocket.

#### *Financial responsibility*

On enrolment, parents/guardians accept financial responsible for fees in signing the Enrolment Application. There are three options as to how financial responsibility can be set up:

- Joint and several financial responsibility (this is the standard option), where a child has been enrolled by two parents/guardians.
- Sole financial responsibility, where a child is enrolled by a single parent/guardian, or only one parent/guardian has elected to take financial responsibility.
- Split financial responsibility, where a child is enrolled by a split family, and have elected to have the account split and two separate accounts are required.

Any changes to the financial responsibility must be requested in writing to the Business Manager and any change is at the sole discretion of St Patrick's.

#### *Guidelines for School Fee Remission*

In cases of genuine hardship, School Fee Remissions may be given. At an interview with the School Principal and Business Manager, or their representatives, the family will need to provide details of their financial position.

School Fee Remissions must be approved by the School Principal or their representative.

School Fee Remissions will normally only apply in the year they are granted and are to be reviewed annually. Any variation to fees by way of remission will be reassessed on application at the commencement of each year.

The Principal, or their representative, may:

- approve a School Fee Remission; or
- determine that a family is not eligible for a School Fee Remission; or
- extend the time over which St Patrick's will accept the payment of outstanding fees.

The Principal, or their representative, will document and securely retain the application made and the remission decision in order to promote equitable and fair treatment of School Fee Remission and provide consistent and standardised remission processes.

In all cases, families will be treated with respect throughout the confidential School Fee Remission process, in order to maintain their dignity during difficult discussions and disclosures, where compassion, fairness and justice are the objective.

#### **Implementation**

This policy is implemented through a combination of:

- Staff training;
- Effective communication with parents/guardians; and
- Effective record keeping procedures.

#### **Appendices:**

**Nil**

#### **Key Legislation and References**

**Nil**

#### **Related Policies**

**Enrolment Policy**

#### **Responsible Officer**

School Principal

#### **Ratified by**

School Principal

#### **Review Date**

January 2023, or upon each change in legislation or reference document.

#### **Policy last updated:**

**Policy last updated on: January 2019**

