



Hardship Policy

To be read in conjunction with the Parent Payment Policy

Rationale

Berwick Chase Primary School is committed to creating a positive connected school and ensuring the students have equity, access and inclusion to all curriculum programs and are able to participate in all programs offered by the school. The Education and Training Reform Act empowers School Councils to charge parents for goods and services used in the course of instruction of their children, as well as raise funds. The school council has a responsibility to ensure the all school students have the best educational opportunities and outcomes, both inside and outside the classroom. We recognise that some families experience financial hardship (wants to pay but cannot) from time to time and in a quest to ensure the best possible education for each child, the following opportunities are available for all families at our school.

Aims

To provide opportunities for children of families experiencing financial hardship to participate in the full breadth of educational experiences as are enjoyed by all students.

How is parental hardship assessed?

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. Assessing hardship and family difficulties on a case by case basis ensures the approach taken provides for a family-centred focus that is individualised and necessarily requires consideration of each and every situation.

Long Term Hardship

One 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. While this is commonly used as an eligibility criterion for government assistance programs, such the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, it does not account for many other indicators of long term hardship, such as homelessness.

Short Term Hardship and Contributing Stressors

There are also a number of circumstances that can impact a family's ability to pay student fees. In either the short or long term, such circumstances can include, but are not limited to:

- Death of an immediate family member or friend
- Family breakdown or severe family disruption e.g. divorce/separation of parents; substance dependence and addiction
- Illness, including serious long term illness or mental illness of the parent or family member
- Family violence
- Homelessness, at risk of homelessness or impacted by transitional housing
- Out-of-home care arrangements or temporary foster parents
- Loss of employment
- Financial stress resulting in difficulty paying the bills, providing food or meeting essential costs, such as medical or transport costs.
- Natural disaster such as drought, bushfire or flood
- Refugee status, including families on a Bridging Visa, Temporary Protection Visa, community detention and asylum seeker families



- Other factors resulting in unforeseen change in the parent's capacity to make payments, whether through a reduction in income or through an increase in non-discretionary expenditure

Implementation

- Parents will be made aware of the costs associated with all payments and voluntary contributions six weeks prior to the due date along with a recommended payments schedule where possible.
- The Parent Payments schedule will include itemised details relating to all payments, an option to purchase goods elsewhere (where appropriate), essential payment dates, options to make payments by instalments, clear definitions of the category of any payments (i.e.: Essential, Optional or Voluntary)
- No student will be treated differently, denied access or refused instruction to the standard curriculum program for not making a payment or voluntary contribution.
- Parents will be made aware of any government financial support schemes (e.g.: 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.
- A second-hand school uniform program is available, as well as the State School's Relief program for families in financial need.
- School Council will also make available a modest annual discretionary budget that the principal may use to assist families experiencing financial hardship.
- All payments and non-payments by families, and participants in any school financial support programs will be strictly confidential.

Parents who engage with the school to discuss hardship should be encouraged to:

- Advise the school of their financial difficulties as soon as practicable
- Act reasonably in their negotiations with Parent Payment contact person and school staff in pursuit of a mutually acceptable outcome
- Be honest and realistic in their assessment of their capacity to contribute to their child's education.
- Advise their Parent Payment contact person if their circumstances change as soon as practicable
- Maintain contact with the Parent Payment contact person if this is required

Evaluation

School Council will review the level and purpose of parent payments and voluntary contributions annually. In doing so, Council will also consider its financial support programs and any Departmental advice or instruction.

This policy was ratified at School Council on Monday 12th September 2016