Rationale:

The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 ensures the provision of free instruction in the standard curriculum program (i.e. eight key learning areas), and empowers school councils to charge for goods and services used in the course of instruction and to raise funds.

The Department 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.

Free instruction includes learning and teaching, instructional supports, materials and resources, administration and facilities required to provide the standard curriculum program. The standard curriculum program includes core learning and teaching activities associated with the Victorian Curriculum.

This policy ensures that:

- costs are kept to a minimum
- payment requests are clearly itemised under the three parent payment categories
- items that students consume or take possession of are accurately costed
- no student will be treated differently, denied access or refused instruction to the standard curriculum program for not making a payment or voluntary contribution
- access to enrolment or advancement to the next year level will not be withheld as a condition of payment for any of the three categories.

School councils are responsible for developing a school-level policy which covers essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions.

Aims:

- To provide ‘free instruction’ as outlined in the Education and Training Reform Act 2006
- To collect funds for essential items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions within DET guidelines.

Definitions:

- Essential items are those items or services that are essential to support the course of instruction in the standard curriculum program that parents or guardians are requested to pay the school to provide or may provide themselves, if appropriate.
  
  These items include:
  - materials that the student takes possession of, including text books and student stationery
  - materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished articles (e.g. cooking, art works)
  - travel costs incurred in the course of receiving the instruction from a teacher or other person; and
  - essential services associated with, but not considered to be part of, ‘instruction’ in the standard curriculum program, such as costs associated with camps and excursions which all students are expected to attend (for example, transport and entrance costs).

- Optional extras 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 supports, resources and administration beyond the provision of the standard curriculum program;
  - extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum program (for example, instrumental music tuition);
  - entry fees for school run performances, productions and events;
• materials for subjects where the payment sought is the difference between the basic materials or services required for the standard curriculum program and higher cost alternatives which may be more desirable (for example, the use of more expensive materials);
• materials and services offered in addition to the ‘standard curriculum program’ (for example, school magazines or school photographs); and
• school facilities and equipment not associated with provision of the ‘standard curriculum program’, and not otherwise provided for through the School Resources Package (for example hire/lease of equipment such as musical instruments or purchase of laptops).

➢ Voluntary financial contributions are for those items and services that parents or guardians are invited to make a donation to the school, for example for grounds maintenance, the Gembrook Primary School Building Fund and general financial contributions or donations.

Implementation:
• Parents and guardians will be provided with early notice of payment requests for essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions (e.g. a minimum of six weeks notice prior to the end of the previous school year).
• Costs will be kept to a minimum with payment requests/letters fair and reasonable. To further assist parents with payments, payment plan options and both cash and electronic payment methods will be made available.
• Alternative payment options are available through the school and parents are encouraged to make an appointment with the school to discuss circumstances and available options.
• Payments may be requested but not required prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used.
• Payment requests to parents will be itemised and the category each items falls under will be clearly identified as an essential education item, optional extra or voluntary financial contribution.
• The administration and financial process of the parent payments will be done through CASES 21 financial reporting system. Receipts will be issued to parents immediately upon making payment on CASES 21.
• Reminders for unpaid essential education items or optional extras will be generated and distributed on a regular basis to parents, but not more than once a month.
• Only the initial invitation for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice will be issued per year to parents and guardians.
• All records of payments or contributions and any outstanding payments by parents and guardians are kept confidential

Evaluation:
Parents are provided accurate confidential information about essential, optional and voluntary payments which relate to their student’s education.
This policy will be reviewed annually.

References: