



SCHOOL FEES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church's preferential option for the poor obligates Catholic schools to ensure that no baptised Catholic student is denied a Catholic education because of a family's inability to pay school fees.

"Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society."

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Encyclical Letter, 187

In recognition of the differential capacity of families to contribute to the costs of education, both the Australian and State Governments incorporate needs-based elements into their recurrent funding of the Catholic school system.

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd. (CECV) policy for allocating funding to Catholic schools also accounts for need in that, all other factors being equal, schools in lower socio-economic areas receive more funding than those in higher socio-economic areas. Also, schools are provided with additional financial assistance for each student of a family who holds an eligible, means-tested Health Care Card (HCC) or Pensioner Concession Card (PCC) which enables the school to offer fee concessions.

This School Fees Policy of the Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sale (CEOSale) acknowledges the significant contribution that individual schools make to the costs of education, through the generation of private income that includes the payment of fees by families. In recognising the role of schools in this area, and in supporting the principle of accessibility of Catholic schools through its needs-based funding formula, CEOSale encourages school communities to establish fee setting, collection, concession and debt recovery practices that are consistent with access and equity priorities.

2.0 PURPOSE

This policy outlines the process by which schools will set and collect fees, provide concessions to families experiencing financial hardship and pursue recovery of unpaid fees.

It will provide a consistent approach across the Diocese to school fee setting, fee collection, fee concessions and fee debt recovery.

This policy acknowledges the need for schools to charge and collect fees and for families to meet their fee obligations with regard to their capacity to pay.

3.0 PRINCIPLES

This policy is embedded in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and, in particular, 'The Dignity of the Human Person', 'Preferential Option for the Poor' and 'The Common Good'.

Dignity of the Human Person: Processes for the collection of school fees, granting of fee concessions and recovery of unpaid school fees need to be transparent, fair and just.

Preferential Option for the Poor: Catholic schools should be accessible to all Catholic families irrespective of capacity to pay.

The Common Good: Each Catholic school is responsible for setting its own fees taking into consideration both the private income needing to be raised and the capacity of their families to pay.

4.0 DEFINITIONS

- 4.1 **Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund (CSEF)** - Victorian Government funding for the students of families who are eligible, means-tested, HCC or PCC holders which is used to offset school fees related to camps, sports and excursions.
- 4.2 **Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd. (CECV)** - The CECV is a company established by the Archbishop of Melbourne and the Bishops of Sandhurst, Sale and Ballarat to allocate, distribute and expend Grants to Catholic Schools in Victoria as provided by a Government Agency.
- 4.3 **Centrelink Health Care Card (HCC)** - Cardholders receive Australian Government help with the cost of prescription medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, funded medical services and access to other government concessions.
- 4.4 **Centrelink Pensioner Concession Card (PCC)** - Cardholders receive Australian Government health concessions and assistance with the cost of living, by reducing the cost of certain goods and services.
- 4.5 **CentrePay** - a free and voluntary service to pay bills and expenses as regular deductions from a client's Centrelink payments.
- 4.6 **Fee Concession** - a remission or exemption from school fees payable as a result of financial hardship.
- 4.7 **Full Fee Paying Overseas Students (FFPOS)** - Overseas/International students on a number of visa sub-classes are ineligible to receive government funding towards their education.
- 4.8 **Private income** - the portion of a school's income which is raised locally, primarily through school fees.
- 4.9 **School Fees** - the fees and levies the school charges families for the education of their children. They include:
 - (a) Recurrent fees - to assist in meeting the day-to-day operating costs of the school e.g. family fees, tuition fees, curriculum levies, camp, sport and excursion levies, technology levies.
 - (b) Capital fees - to assist in the purchase of capital equipment and buildings or the repayment of loans for capital purposes.

5.0 PROCEDURES

5.1 Policy Development

School communities are required to develop and publish their own school fee policy and procedures in line with the CEOSale School Fees Policy.

5.2 Fee Setting

- Catholic schools are obliged to set fees according to criteria that represent a thorough and transparent assessment of the internal and external factors influencing costs and the ability of families to pay.
- The operation of a school is subject to complex regulation regarding its registration with the Victorian Registration and Qualification Authority (VRQA), charitable status and government funding eligibility. These, amongst other things, impose important restrictions on how the school applies income generated from its conduct, including school fees.
- Fees and their payment should be discussed with parents at the time of enrolment. Relevant fee policies and guidelines should be made available at that time.
- Before the commencement of a new school year, all school fees and other charges should be reviewed and approved in writing, by the Parish Priest/Canonical Administrator, unless delegated in writing to the Principal.
- The Fee Structure must not include any collection of money on behalf of a parish. If a parish wishes to charge a levy it must be invoiced directly by the parish from the parish office, collected separately from the school and not pass through the school's accounts. Moreover, the school enrolment or the level of school fees which parents pay must not in any way be made conditional on or otherwise affected by a parish levy contribution. A parish levy contribution must be voluntary.
- FFPOS are required to be charged full fees for the cost of their education as they do not attract government funding.
- The Fee Structure could provide a discount for families with more than one student at the school.
- The fee Structure must not provide a discount to families conditional on providing financial support to the parish. Schools must not adopt a structure of school fees whereby a discounted rate is available to school parents who contribute a prescribed minimum amount to the parish, through the thanksgiving program or otherwise, known as a 'two-tiered school fee'. These fee structures could arguably be seen as a reduction in school income or redirecting school income to be applied for non-school or non-educational purposes.
- Where a School Building Fund exists, schools may encourage contributions to the school building fund. It is important, however, that donations to the school building fund be a 'gift' in that they are freely given and do not provide any benefit to the donor. If a school imposes a mandatory contribution to the school building fund or payment of the same will entitle the parent to some discount to the school fees, it will not be a donation or a gift, and the school must make it clear to parents that the contribution to the school building fund levy will not be tax deductible.

5.3 Fee Collection

- Catholic schools are required to develop strategies for fee collection that are consistent with good financial practices and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.
- To ensure a steady income stream and to make fee payments more manageable for families, schools should offer weekly and fortnightly fee instalments via direct debit or CentrePay.
- Other payment options, including electronic funds transfer and monthly and termly payments, should also be available to families with a good history of timely payments.

5.4 Fee Concessions (Remissions / Exemptions)

- Catholic schools are expected to provide fee concessions to families experiencing genuine financial hardship.
- Any family facing financial hardship is strongly encouraged to apply to their school for a fee concession.
- Any family who holds an eligible, means-tested Centrelink HCC or PCC is strongly encouraged to apply for a school fee concession.
- The Parish Priest/Canonical Administrator or the Principal (if delegated in writing) may approve a school fee concession for the current school year.
- An application for a fee concession should be made on the school approved form and all information provided must be treated in the strictest of confidence.
- FFPOS students are considered ineligible for a school fee concession.

5.5 Recovery of Unpaid Fees

- All families are expected to meet their school fee obligations.
- Where parents who have the financial means, refuse to pay school fees, every effort must be made to help them understand their obligations and the impact that non-payment has on the school's ability to provide a quality education for all students.
- It is a matter of justice to all families that all available steps are taken to ensure that school fees are paid.
- The recovery of unpaid fees must be approached pastorally, compassionately and sensitively, to protect the student as much as possible from the public embarrassment that could arise.
- At all times in the recovery of unpaid fees, the Parish Priest/Canonical Administrator should be kept informed.
- After all other measures to recover unpaid fees have been exhausted, legal proceedings may be considered.
- The written approval of the Director and the Bishop, Diocese of Sale, must be obtained before any court action is initiated.
- The judgment as to whether parents are unable to pay because of their financial situation must err on the side of leniency.
- Schools should make every effort to monitor and manage school fee payments to avoid school fee debt accumulating.

5.6 Communication with the school and wider community

Fee policies and related documentation should be accessible in a variety of ways and from a variety of sources including the school website.

6.0 EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- 6.1 Catholic schools in the Diocese of Sale will develop policy and procedures for the timely collection and remission of school fees in line with the Catholic Church's preferential option for the poor.
- 6.2 All Catholic families in the Diocese of Sale desiring a Catholic education for their children will be encouraged and supported in accessing the educational opportunities provided by their local Catholic Primary and Secondary school.
- 6.3 All Catholic schools in the Diocese of Sale will have a consistent approach to the setting and collecting of school fees, the provision of fee concessions and the recovery of unpaid school fees.

7.0 REFERENCES

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

Catholic Education Office Diocese of Sale, Primary School Fees Guidelines – Fee Setting

Catholic Education Office Diocese of Sale, Primary School Fees Guidelines – Fee Concessions

Catholic Education Office Diocese of Sale, Primary School Fees Guidelines – Fee Collection

Catholic Education Office Diocese of Sale, Primary School Fees Guidelines – Debt Recovery

8.0 REVIEW

Draft Review: July 2016

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