



STRONGER SCHOOLS

An inclusive education plan for Victoria

MAKE PUBLIC EDUCATION AFFORDABLE FOR EVERY VICTORIAN FAMILY

Every child and young person participates fully in education regardless of their family circumstances.

Every child should be able to access a high quality education and participate fully in educationally enriching activities, regardless of their family's capacity to pay for essential items and activities. While the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic) prescribes that delivery of the standard education curriculum should be free for all students, schools often charge families for digital devices, school uniforms, textbooks, camps, excursions, elective subjects and speech or occupational therapy.

Research by the Australian Scholarship Group suggests families' average annual out-of-pocket cost for sending a child to a Victorian Government primary school is \$3,489 and \$5,170 for secondary school.¹

Although the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund and State Schools' Relief provide some support for disadvantaged families, for many, they do not cover the full out-of-pocket costs. Community sector organisations continue to be overwhelmed by requests from families for assistance to meet educational costs, particularly at the start of each school year.

Where families cannot afford essential items, children and young people risk being excluded from the standard school curriculum and activities, increasing their risk of disengagement, behavioral issues, bullying, and poorer learning and wellbeing outcomes. The Victorian Government can prevent this by fully funding schools to deliver the standard curriculum.

In 2015, Victoria's Auditor-General found that the Department of Education and Training (DET) did not understand the actual costs of running a school and 'its funding model distributes money based on relative need, rather than actual need'. School principals report that the inadequacy of school funding is the reason for increasing parental payments.

In determining what families should be charged for, Victorian state schools and school councils are responsible for developing their own parent payment policies based on DET guidelines. However, the Auditor-General found schools still do not understand or comply with the DET Parent Payment Policy guidelines, and that there was limited monitoring and oversight of this by DET.⁴

1

Provide free education in the standard curriculum

- DET should identify a ‘standard basket of education goods’, which outlines essential items (including IT) and activities required to provide free instruction to all students at all levels of schooling, and fund schools accordingly to cover these.
- In the interim, funding should continue for State Schools’ Relief⁵ and the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund⁶ to support eligible students’ participation.

2

Assist children and young people from families experiencing financial disadvantage to participate fully in school and extra-curricular activities

- DET educates schools to ensure compliance with the ‘Parent Payment Policy’ guidelines⁷ and ‘Personal Devices – Parent Payments and Access’ policy.⁸
- DET monitors and ensures parent payment policies are implemented consistently across the state, and identifies and addresses systemic issues.
- DET supports schools to develop and implement inclusive policies to assist students and families experiencing poverty and disadvantage by supporting the development of a hardship policy.
- Fund a new free Myki card to support students experiencing financial disadvantage to travel on public transport. This will support children and young people’s attendance at school and participation in extra-curricular activities.

1. Australian Scholarship Group, ASG’s Education Cost Estimates, Metropolitan Victoria Estimated schooling costs in 2018, accessed at https://www.asg.com.au/doc/default-source/2018-asg-planning-for-education-index/asg_edcosts_schoolcosts_-2018_vic_metro.pdf?sfvrsn=2

2. Victorian Auditor-General’s Office, Additional School Costs for Families, 2015, accessed at <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/additional-school-costs-families>

3. Victorian Government, School Policy and Advisory Guide – Parent Payments, accessed at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/Pages/parentpayments.aspx>

4. Victorian Auditor-General’s Office, Follow Up of Selected 2014–15 Performance Audits, 2017, p.3.

5. Victorian Government, Schools Policy and Advisory Guide – State Schools Relief, accessed at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/Pages/stateschoolsrelief.aspx>

6. Note: The Camps, Sports and Excursions has only been funded for one year, see Victorian Government, Victorian Budget 18/19, Getting things gone, Budget Paper No. 3, p.44, accessed at <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/budgetfiles201819.budget.vic.gov.au/2018-19+State+Budget+-+Service+Delivery.pdf>

7. Victorian Government, School Policy and Advisory Guide – Parent Payments, accessed at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/Pages/parentpayments.aspx>

8. Victorian Government, Schools Policy and Advisory Guide – Personal Devices – Parent Payments and Access, accessed at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/Pages/personaldev.aspx>