RATIONAL:

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

Free instruction includes learning and teaching, instructional supports, materials and resources, administration and facilities associated with the provision of the standard curriculum program. The standard curriculum is curriculum that is assessed under the VELS, VCE or VCAL.

School Councils are permitted to charge parents fees to cover costs for goods, services or other things provided to a student that are not directly related to the provision of free instruction. Payments requested from parents must be kept to a minimum and must not exceed the cost of the relevant materials or services to the student.

The Department of Education [DET] 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 which are an integral part of the SRP.

GENERAL STATEMENT:

Parent payments fall into three categories:

1. Essential Education Items:

These are items which parents/guardians pay the school to provide or may provide themselves, if appropriate. These items are essential to support instruction in the standard curriculum program and 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 finalised articles.
- school uniform [where applicable]
- activities associated with, but not part of instruction in the standard curriculum program, such as costs associated with camps and excursions which all students are expected to attend [e.g transport and entry costs]

NB: If parents/guardians choose to provide equivalent materials themselves, this should be done in consultation with the school, and items should meet the specifications provided by the school. However some items which, due to their nature, can only be provided by the school
2. **Optional Extras:**

These are items provided in addition to the standard curriculum program, and are offered to all students. They are provided on a user-pays basis and if parents/guardians choose to access them for students, they will be required to pay for them. These items include:

- instructional support material, resources and administration beyond the provision of the standard curriculum program. [eg. personal student computer printing]
- extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum program [ex. instrumental music tuition]
- school based performances, productions or events.
- materials, where the payment sought is the difference between the basic material/service required for access to the standard curriculum program and the higher cost alternative which may be more desirable. [eg. use of more expensive materials]
- materials and services offered in addition to the standard curriculum program.
- school facilities and equipment not associated with provision of the standard curriculum program, and not else provided for through the SRP.

3. **Voluntary Financial Contributions:**

Parents/guardians, or anyone else, can be invited to make a donation to the school for the following purposes:

- contributions to a building trust fund or contributions to a library trust fund [these trust funds are approved by the Australian Taxation Office and are tax deductible]
- contributions for a specific purpose identified by the school [eg. equipment, materials or services] in addition to those funded through the SRP. This may include additional computers or student related services.
- general voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school

**IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES:**

- Payment requests must be accompanied by the following information:
  - a description of each of the three parent payment categories
  - details of what parents are being asked to pay for
  - clearly itemised within each category
  - that parents are required to provide essential education items for their children, and have the option of purchasing these through the school or through a local supplier, where appropriate
  - the availability of alternative payment options and an invitation to contact the principal [or his nominee] if the parent wishes to discuss these
  - a copy of the school level policy

- Ensure all communication with parents regarding requests for payment is fair and reasonable.
- Provide parents and guardians with a minimum of six weeks notice of payment request.
• Payment may be requested but not required prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used.
• Not withhold access to enrolment or advancement as a condition of payment.
• Ensure the status and details of any payments or non-payments are confidential.
• Administrative and financial processes are compliant with DET requirements such as CASES 21 financial reporting
• Only the initial invitation for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice per year is sent to all parents/guardians
• Invoices for unpaid essential education items or optional items accepted by parents are generated and distributed on a regular basis, but not more than once a month.
• Receipts are issued to parents immediately upon payment and receipted on CASES 21.
• School Councils must not coerce or harass parents or guardians for payment or use collection agencies or debt collectors.
• Parents who have difficulty paying for essential items are encouraged to discuss alternative payment methods with the Principal or his nominee.
• A range of support options including: Payment Plans, Centrepay and Bpay, Schoolkids Bonus [eligible families] are available.
• Payment plans must be completed within the year the amount outstanding relates to thus instalments will be calculated accordingly.

**EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING:**

• Copies of this policy are available to parents on request.