

HARDSHIP POLICY

Aim

To ensure that families experiencing hardship are aware of options and support available so that every child has access to educational opportunities and is not disadvantaged or excluded.

Rationale

Hardship refers to an inability to pay due to financial difficulty or circumstance. Hardship can arise from a variety of situations that can be either short or long term. Hardship is not necessarily related to the income of the family but can result from contributing stressors which can impact a family's ability to make financial payments. Hardship can be experienced as a result of a sudden change in circumstances which leads to temporary financial difficulty; as a result of a low and/or fixed income which leads to ongoing financial difficulty; or from a combination of low income and an unanticipated change in circumstances. While some families may require flexibility and temporary assistance, such as an extension of time to pay or flexible payment arrangements, other families may not expect their situation to improve in the foreseeable future and will instead require ongoing support over a longer period.

Implementation

Early Identification through Communication

We understand that at times, families may experience financial difficulty or hardship and may find requests for payment stressful. We encourage parents experiencing financial stress, to contact the Business Manager, to establish a payment plan and make payments on a regular basis. Confidential arrangements can be made by calling the school office to speak with the Business Manager on 9743 4966 or via email melton.ss@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Strategies to Support Parents

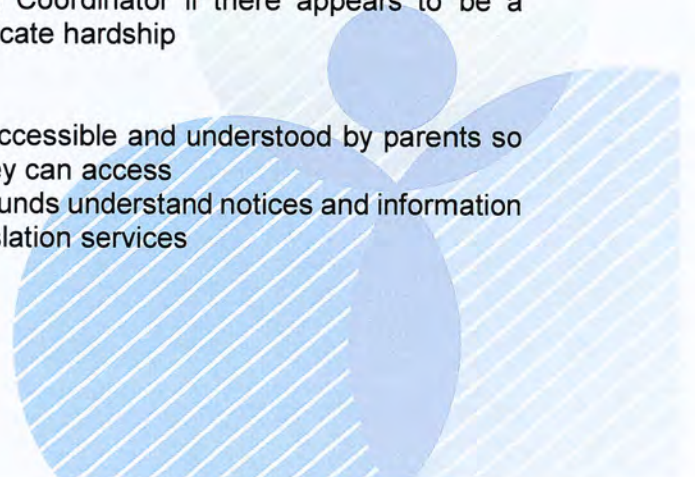
Early identification is critical in supporting families to manage financial hardship. The staff at Melton Specialist School may employ one or more of the following strategies:

Through the teaching staff:

- Ensure students are attending school and monitor any unusual absences
- Ensure students have brought lunch/snacks to school
- Observe any sudden changes to student's health and wellbeing
- Ensure parents from non-English speaking backgrounds understand notices and information or inform the Assistant Principal of the need for translation services
- Communicate with parents and offer support in a respectful manner
- Communicate any concerns to the Wellbeing Coordinator
- Be mindful of non-return of notices, payments and permission forms e.g. for excursions, camps, activities, etc. and bring this to the attention of the Wellbeing Coordinator
- Encourage parents to speak with the Wellbeing Coordinator if there appears to be a preference to keep the student home which may indicate hardship

Through the Office Staff:

- Ensure information on payment options is easily accessible and understood by parents so that they know what to expect and what supports they can access
- Ensure parents from non-English speaking backgrounds understand notices and information or inform the Assistant Principal of the need for translation services



- Ensure parents are provided with early notice of annual payment requests for Parent Contributions (i.e. a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous school year). This enables parents to save and budget accordingly
- Ensure parents are provided with reasonable notice of any other payment requests that arise during the school year including camps, excursions and incursions, ensuring parents have a clear understanding of the full financial contribution being sought
- Be sensitive to any change communicated by the parent which may indicate hardship
- Ensure the status and details of any financial arrangements are kept confidential and only shared with the relevant school personnel
- Ensure parents experiencing hardship are not pursued for outstanding school fees from one year to the next
- No use of debt collectors to obtain outstanding school funds owed to the school from parents
- Issue only one reminder notice per year to parents for voluntary financial contributions
- Invoices/statements for unpaid essential items, or optional items accepted by parents, are not generated more than monthly or according to the parent payment arrangement with the school.

Through the Principal Class and Wellbeing Coordinator:

- Ensure staff are aware of the school's Hardship Policy
- Ensure parents experiencing hardship are aware of the support available to avoid stress, disengagement and avoidance
- Ensure families feel they can approach the school to discuss their concerns and be supported in a respectful and confidential manner
- Ensure the student's access to educational opportunities is not impacted

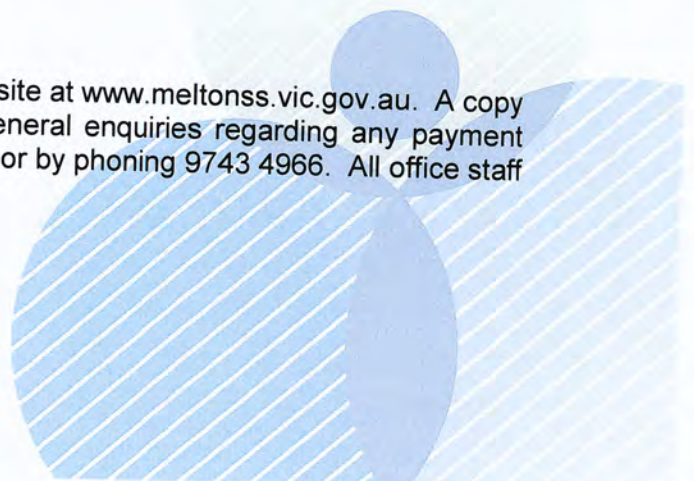
Support for Families

Consideration is provided to families experiencing long term hardship or short term crisis on a confidential, case by case basis. We encourage parents experiencing financial stress, to contact the Business Manager, to establish a payment plan and make payments on a regular basis. Confidential arrangements can be made by calling the school office to speak with the Business Manager on 9743 4966 or via email melton.ss@edumail.vic.gov.au. The school's hardship arrangements include a proactive approach to providing support for parents experiencing financial difficulty and include:

- CSEF
- Payment Plans
- State Schools Relief
- Reduced or subsidised fees
- Waiving of fees
- Provision of food
- Provision of second hand uniform
- use of school owned 1:1 ICT equipment while at school
- Agency funding sought where available

Communication

This Hardship Policy is published on the school website at www.meltonss.vic.gov.au. A copy may also be requested from the school office. General enquiries regarding any payment requests can be made via the office either in person or by phoning 9743 4966. All office staff are able to assist with general enquiries.



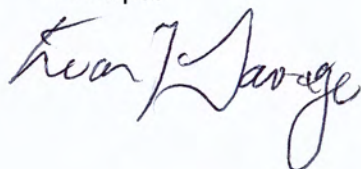
Evaluation

This policy will be reviewed annually. The next review will take place in 2017. School Council approves, monitors and reviews the Hardship Policy on a regular basis to ensure access, equity and inclusion, affordability, safety, engagement and support, respect and confidentiality, transparency and accountability.

Certification

This policy was endorsed by school council at the meeting held on 6th December 2016.

Principal



School Council President

