



# MERENDA PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL HARDSHIP POLICY

## **RATIONALE**

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.

## **AIMS**

The Victorian community shares a vision to build an education system that champions excellence and ensures that every child and young person has access to the opportunities to succeed in life, regardless of their background or circumstances. Hardship refers to the inability to pay due to financial difficulties or circumstances. This can be temporary financial difficulty due to a sudden unexpected change of circumstances; as a result of low and/or fixed income which leads to ongoing financial difficulty or a combination of low income and unexpected change in circumstances. The Mernda Park PS Hardship Policy reflects a proactive strategy to discreetly support families experiencing unexpected loss, illness, job loss, relationship changes and those experiencing longer-term hardship.

## **EARLY IDENTIFICATION THROUGH COMMUNICATION**

Mernda Park PS understand that at times families may experience financial difficulty or hardship and may find requests for payment stressful. Families are encouraged to contact Finoula Murray (Business Manager) in the office on 03 8776 9700 or [Mernda.park.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:Mernda.park.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au) for a confidential discussion and plan of support or Mary Ryan (Principal) if they prefer.

## **STRATEGY TO SUPPORT PARENTS**

Early identification is critical in supporting families to manage financial hardship so Mernda Park PS may employ such proactive strategies as:

### **Through Learning Community teachers:**

- Ensure students are attending school and monitor any unusual absences
- Ensure students have brought lunch/snacks to school
- Observe any sudden changes to students health and wellbeing
- Ensure parents from non-English speaking backgrounds understand notices and information or let the office know to organise free translation services
- Communicate with parents any concerns and offer support in a respectful manner
- Confidentially bring any concerns to the Principal class

- Observe if notices for payment and permission forms e.g. for excursion, camps, activities are not returned and bring it confidentially to the attention of the Business Manager
- Encourage the parent to speak confidentially to the Business Manager, Assistant Principal or Principal if there appears to be a preference to keep the student home which may indicate hardship.

**Through the office team:**

- Ensure information on payment options are available, accessible and easily understood to all parents so that they know what to expect and what supports they can access
- Ensure parents from non-English speaking backgrounds understand the information or organise a free translation service
- Ensure parents are provided with early notice of annual payment requests for Material Charges. This enable parent 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 parent have a clear understanding of the full financial contributions 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 relevant school personnel
- Ensure parents experiencing hardship are not pursued for outstanding Material Charges from one year to the next
- Mernda Park PS will not use debt collectors to obtain outstanding school funds owed to the school from parent
- Invoice/statements for unpaid Material Charges or other outstanding charges, are not generated more than monthly or according to the parent payment arrangement with the school.

**Through the Principal Class and Wellbeing team:**

- Ensure staff are aware of the Mernda Park PS 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 students access to educational opportunities is not impacted.

**SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES**

Consideration of hardship arrangements in respect to payment is provided to families experiencing long term hardship or short term crisis on a confidential, case by case basis. Families are encouraged to contact Finoula Murray (Business Manager) or Mary Ryan (Principal), for a confidential discussion and formulation of a plan of support, on 03 8776 9700 or at [mernda.park.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:mernda.park.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au).

Mernda Park PS hardship arrangements include a proactive approach to providing support for parents experiencing financial difficulty and include:

- CSEF
- State School Relief
- Payment Plans
- Reduced or subsidised fees
- Waiving of fees

- Attendance at excursions/camps/sports from Student Welfare funds for those not eligible for CSEF
- Provision of food
- Agency funding sought where available

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's three year review cycle.

This policy was last ratified by school council on...21 February 2019.....