



# St Mary's School

To do ordinary things extraordinarily well

## School Fees: Setting and Collection

### Rationale

The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) has a responsibility to make a Catholic education available to all Catholic students whose parents seek a Catholic education for them, while embodying the Church's preferential option for the poor and disadvantaged (Mandate, p 50), insofar as this is possible.

St Mary's School is reminded that it is essential to minimise potential barriers for parents such as fees and other costs (Mandate, p 7), and to keep costs to parents as low as possible (Mandate p, 38). Schools need to avoid material ambitions that might lead to higher fees and force them into giving counter-witness (Mandate, p. 22).

St Mary's School has a responsibility to communicate the financial constraints under which they operate to parents enrolling their children in Catholic schools.

Parents are required to make a commitment to support Catholic education financially by paying fees as a necessary contribution to the costs of delivering a Catholic education.

### Definitions

#### *School Fees:*

- for the purpose of this policy statement, School Fees shall include the total cost of educating a child and comprises: tuition fees; levies (e.g. curriculum levies, or IT levies); and other charges (e.g. book hire, insurance, compulsory excursions<sup>2</sup>, camp fees, amenities, building levies, etc.).

#### *Application Fee:*

- the fee associated with processing an application for student enrolment into a school.

#### *Enrolment Deposit:*

- school fees paid in advance as a deposit, associated with securing a student enrolment into a school, after an offer of enrolment has been made by the school.

#### *Role of School Boards or School Councils:*

- in diocesan accountable schools, Boards are responsible for the financial management of the school, including the setting and collecting of school fees in accordance with the policies and guidelines of the CECWA<sup>3</sup>.
- in Order accountable schools, Boards or Councils may only have an advisory role with regard to the setting and collection of school fees.

### Scope

This policy applies to all Catholic schools in Western Australia, in respect of children enrolled from Kindergarten through to Year 12.

## Principles

- 1.1 Schools shall ensure that school fees reflect the socio-economic status of the school community, in the context of the policy rationale.
- 1.2 Financial grounds shall never be the reason for the non-enrolment or exclusion of any child from a Catholic school.
- 1.3 The collection of school fees shall be approached in the spirit of Christian charity and justice.
- 1.4 The withholding of access to students from normal pastoral and curriculum provision shall not be used as a fee collection strategy.
- 1.5 Families with limited capacity to pay school fees have an entitlement to claim a school fee concession. Requests for fee concessions shall be treated with dignity, fairness, compassion and confidentiality.
- 1.6 Families with eligible means tested family concession cards (Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card) have an automatic entitlement to school fee concessions.
- 1.7 The confidentiality of all information pertaining to parents and/or guardians and the payment of school fees shall be maintained, as mandated in legislation<sup>4</sup>.
- 1.8 Where parents and/or guardians have the capacity to pay fees, the collection of school fees shall be actively pursued.

## Procedures

- 2.1 School fees are to be announced to the school community before the end of the previous school year. Fees and all discounts, including CECWA's Health Care Card Discount Scheme, shall be clearly advertised and easily accessible to parents. This includes fee brochures, school websites and parent newsletters.
- 2.2 All schools shall comply with a standard schedule of fees to ensure consistency and comparability across all schools in the System. The standard schedule is provided in the *Supporting Guidelines* document that complements this policy<sup>5</sup>.
- 2.3 All schools shall have a written *School Fees: Setting and Collection* policy outlining the above principles, school fees and payment methods. Specific issues to be addressed are:
  - a recognition of the Church's preferential option for the poor and disadvantaged;
  - communication of the policy to parents;
  - details of school fees as well as information relating to the discounts and fee concessions defined in this policy;
  - a timeline for the payment of accounts;
  - a process for negotiating the method of payment and the provision of concessions, if required;
  - information regarding access to the various forms of government

- assistance; and
  - procedures following non-payment, up to and including Judgement;
- 2.4 The school shall update annually its own fee policy to reflect:
- a) any changes to the CECWA *School Fees: Setting and Collection* policy;
  - b) any legislative changes;
  - c) any community socio-economic considerations.
- 2.5 The Principal may, from time to time, request financial information from families to support applications for fee concessions or any other concessions.
- 2.6 Families that are holders of an eligible means-tested family concession card are simply required to provide evidence that their card is valid for the duration of the academic year.
- 2.7 On application for admission, parents and/or guardians will be provided with the school's fee policy.
- 2.8 Acknowledgment of the fee collection procedures shall be on the *Application for Enrolment* form which shall be signed by both parents and/or guardians. In the case of a sole custodial parent or guardian, one signature will suffice.

#### ***Fees Prior to Enrolment***

- 2.9 Application fees, if applicable to the school, shall not exceed \$55.00 or 1% of the school annual tuition fee, whichever is the greater. Application fees are non-refundable.
- 2.10 Enrolment Deposits, if applicable to the school, shall be no more than 25% of the annual school tuition fee and shall be deducted from the first semester's tuition fees in the year of enrolment. Where circumstances beyond the control of parents result in an enrolment deposit not being paid, the principal shall consider waiving it.

#### ***Fee Setting***

- 2.11 Annual school fees shall be set by the School Board during the budget process each year. Increases to total school fees shall be in accordance with the maximum increase parameters annually set by the CECWA.
- 2.12 Diocesan accountable schools wishing to exceed the maximum increase in school fees shall obtain the prior written approval of the Executive Director of Catholic Education.
- 2.13 Order accountable schools for which the CECWA is their Approved Authority that wish to exceed the maximum increase in total school fees shall first consult with the Executive Director of Catholic Education, before obtaining written approval of the Congregational Leader.
- 2.14 Order accountable schools which are their Own Approved Authority that wish to exceed the maximum increase in total school fees shall first obtain the written approval of the Congregational Leader and inform the Executive Director of Catholic Education in writing.

**Fee Discounts**

- 2.15 Families with limited capacity to pay school fees have an entitlement to claim a fee concession. Requests for fee concessions shall be treated with dignity, fairness, compassion and confidentiality.
- 2.16 The CECWA introduced the Health Care Card Discount Scheme in 2005 to provide an automatic fee concession for the holders of eligible means tested family concession cards. This discount shall be implemented across all year levels, from Kindergarten to Year 12. Further details of the Health Care Card Discount Scheme are available for schools in the *Supporting Guidelines* document that complements this policy.

The total discounted school fees for holders of eligible means tested family concession cards are set as follows:

Kindergarten to Year 6	\$300, per student
Year 7 to Year 12	\$1,500 per student

These school fees shall be annually reviewed by the CECWA, based on changes to the eligibility income thresholds, and shall be communicated to schools by the CEWAoffice during the budget process each year.

Family building levies shall be charged at the corresponding percentage of the Health Care Card school fee.

Kindergarten to Year 6	30% of HCC fee	\$90 per family
Year 7 to Year 12	20% of HCC fee	\$300 per family

Schools may add certain specific additional charges for holders of eligible means-tested family concession cards. These may be levied on a user-pays basis and could include charges associated with VET courses, camps, music lessons and other activities where there are direct and additional costs associated with such activities.

Schools are encouraged to keep these costs to a minimum, within the spirit and intent of this policy, and to assist those families who encounter difficulties in meeting these additional charges.

**Discounts for families**

- 2.17 Families with siblings enrolled in Kindergarten through to Year 12 in the same Catholic school are entitled to a level of family discount that shall be determined by each School Board or Council. CECWA highly recommends the following family discount levels:

2nd child enrolled	20% of that child's tuition fees
3rd child enrolled	40% of that child's tuition fees
4th child enrolled and beyond	100% of that child's tuition fees

- 2.18 Kindergarten fees shall be charged as a proportion of the respective Year 1 fee. The specific proportion shall be equal to the FTE of the Kindergarten program that the school runs.
- 2.19 All students and families are eligible for family discounts, including families who receive automatic tuition fee discounts as holders of eligible means tested family concession cards.
- 2.20 All Catholic schools shall ensure that the usual family discounts are offered for Special Education students whether siblings attend the same Catholic school or a number of Catholic schools.
- 2.21 Consideration should be given to family fee discounts in situations where families have children enrolled in more than one Catholic school. Although the provision of such discounts is not mandatory, schools are strongly encouraged to recognise families' support of the System by providing additional family discounts in these circumstances.

### ***Fee Collection***

- 2.22 Catholic schools are required to develop strategies for fee collection that are consistent with the principles of this policy.
- Fees and their payment should be discussed with parents at the time of enrolment. Relevant information on school fees and the specific school policy shall be made available at that time;
  - Schools shall facilitate multiple ways and frequencies for parents to pay e.g. debit card, credit card, direct debit or bank transfer; and weekly, monthly, per term or yearly;
  - Fees for the following year shall be communicated to in advance of the year-end, and be published prominently and unambiguously in newsletters and on the school website;
  - A full statement of fees payable for the year should be provided to each parent at the start of the school year and periodic statements (e.g. per term) should follow.
- 2.23 The case of parents who are able but unwilling to pay fees can be problematic for schools. Every effort must be made to help parents understand their obligations as a matter of justice to the whole school community. The recovery of unpaid fees, particularly if this involves legal action, must be approached humanely and sensitively to protect the child as much as possible from the public embarrassment that could arise.
- 2.24 The steps to be taken in relation to the collection of unpaid fees are as follows:
1. A written communication shall be sent to the parents, bringing promptly to their attention the outstanding balance.
  2. Should there be no response within 14 days, an appropriate person(s) shall approach the parents on a personal basis, in a sensitive, discreet and confidential manner.
  3. If the personal approach cannot be made, or no action results from it within another 14 days, a formal registered letter from the school Principal should

be used to remind parents of their financial obligations. This letter should include an invitation to discuss the matter with the school and a specified timeframe for a response. Refer to *Sample Letter 1: Fee Obligations* in the *Supporting Guidelines* document.

4. Should there be no response or action within 14 days of the letter, the school Principal shall send a formal registered letter with a final notice, seeking payment and outlining the possible outcomes, including legal action, which could occur if payment is not received within the specified timeframe. Refer to *Sample Letter 2: Fee Obligations* in the *Supporting Guidelines* document.
5. If, despite this last letter, there is no response or action the school Board may approve to engage the services of a debt collection agency or a solicitor to recover outstanding fees and any additional costs.
6. In the event that debt collection agent is not successful in contacting the parents or in establishing a debt repayment plan, schools may consider initiating court proceedings. Before this is done, schools shall inform in writing the Executive Director of Catholic Education as well as the Congregational Leader (in the case of order accountable schools).
7. Before any enforcement proceedings are taken, such as a Property Seizure and Sale Order, Earnings Appropriation Order, or any other enforcement action, including the launching of a caveat on a property, schools shall obtain written approval from the Executive Director of Catholic Education (diocesan accountable schools) or the Congregational Leader (order accountable schools).
8. Schools shall keep comprehensive documentation of each attempt to resolve the problems of outstanding fees.
9. Under no circumstances can a child enrolled in a school be refused on-going enrolment because their parents have not paid fees.

## References

Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 2009 – 2015

CECWA *School Excursions* policy

Catholic School Board Constitution, Western Australia

*Privacy Act* 1988

Supporting Guidelines for Schools, CECWA *School Fees: Setting and Collection* policy

## Related Documents

Nil