



DIOCESAN SCHOOL FEE MANAGEMENT POLICY

RATIONALE

This policy is intended to provide comprehensive, transparent and accessible information regarding the management of school fees to all stakeholders across the school system. These stakeholders include families, both current and prospective; School Principals and their staff; Clergy; and Catholic Education Office staff.

The following are key aims relating to the management of school fees across Catholic Education in the Diocese of Wollongong-

- To give a practical response to the Church's principles of the common good and a preferential option for the poor
- To honour the Diocese's commitment that no family seeking a Catholic education is denied access to enrolment due to **genuine** financial hardship
- To give centrality to the principles of equity, justice and respect for all families within our school communities
- To provide greater consistency and transparency in relation to the setting and collection of school fees across the Diocese
- To maintain high standards of ethical and financial practice
- To identify appropriate levels of privacy and confidentiality

SCHOOL FEE MANAGEMENT

Management of school fees involves a number of different activities including **Invoicing, Receipting, the granting of Fee Concession and Fee Collection**. These activities are carried out by individual schools, with the support of the School Fees Liaison Team located at the Catholic Education Office.

INVOICING OF SCHOOL FEES

Catholic schools are only partially funded by governments, both State and Federal, therefore school fees, paid by parent/carers, are essential to help meet the gap between government funding and the cost of providing quality educational outcomes and experiences for students.

In determining the amount of school fees to be charged, the financial commitment of our families in sending their child/children to a Catholic school is foremost in deliberations. It is always our intent to minimise the burden on families and ensure timely communication in relation to school fees.

The following provides an explanation of the different types of school fees invoiced and the purposes for which they are used:

SCHOOL FEES – CATHOLIC EDUCATION, DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG SYSTEM OF SCHOOLS	
PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOLS	
PARISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS	SECONDARY SCHOOLS
TUITION FEES	TUITION FEES
Tuition fees are set each year by the Bishop. The school retains a portion of this fee to assist with operating costs. The balance is returned to the Catholic Education Office to assist with the payment of salaries, workers compensation/public liability insurance and other operating costs. Charged per family.	Tuition fees are set each year by the Bishop. The school retains a portion of this fee to assist with operating costs. The balance is returned to the Catholic Education Office to assist with the payment of salaries, workers compensation/public liability insurance and other operating costs. Charged per student with Sibling Discounts.

SCHOOL FEES – CATHOLIC EDUCATION, DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG SYSTEM OF SCHOOLS	
PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOLS	
PARISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS	SECONDARY SCHOOLS
SEDSO BUILDING & MAINTENANCE LEVY	BUILDING LEVY
The School Enhancement and Debt Servicing Obligation levies are set annually by the Bishop. The income from the levy contributes to the capital and maintenance costs of facilities. Primary Schools collect the SEDSO Levy on behalf of the Parishes across the Diocese. These funds are used to provide capital grants to schools for new facilities, maintenance and to meet loan payments for school buildings. Charged per family.	Building Fund Levies are set annually by the Bishop. The income from the levy contributes to the capital and maintenance costs of facilities. High Schools collect the Building Levy on behalf of the Catholic Education Office. These funds are used to provide capital grants to schools for new facilities, maintenance and to meet loan payments for school buildings. Charged per student with Sibling Discounts.
SCHOOL RESOURCE & OTHER SCHOOL BASED FEES	SCHOOL RESOURCE & OTHER SCHOOL BASED FEES
School Resource Fees are set by individual School Principals and approved by the Catholic Education Office. This fee is used to pay for school resources, educational activities, subject consumables such as photocopying, stationery, etc. This fee is charged per student. At times there may be additional school based fees set by School Principals such as Excursion/Camp Fees and other activities. Charged per student.	School Resource and Other School Based Fees are set by individual School Principals and approved by the Catholic Education Office. Broadly, the School based fees are categorised as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teaching, Resources and Course specific fees ▪ Fees for Activities eg Retreats, camps, excursions, sport and other additional learning activities ▪ Other Fees Charged per student. Some schools charge other school based fees e.g. Parents and Friends Levies or School Magazine Fees, etc. Charged per family.

COMMUNICATION TO PARENT/CARERS REGARDING SCHOOL FEE INVOICING

Schools will issue families with School Fee Information annually which sets out all fees that may be invoiced. Following the actual invoicing of applicable fees, schools are responsible for issuing an annual Invoice/Statement in Term One with further Invoice/Statements issued monthly by email or by the term in hard copy. Statements will be sent home with the oldest child of the family in the school or emailed to parent/carers.

CALCULATION OF FEES IN THE CASE OF EARLY WITHDRAWAL OR LATE ENTRY

For students leaving or enrolling in a school throughout the year, a Diocesan School Fee Method of Calculation Invoicing procedure will be applied. This invoicing is based on pro-rata principles where possible; however, where students have accessed activities, received resources, etc. parents/carers will need to pay these fees in full. Additionally, any outstanding resource not returned to the school by the leaving date eg books, equipment, etc. will be invoiced to school fees and payment in full is required.

PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY

The Principal of each Diocesan school is required to ensure that all personnel involved in school fees management maintain strict confidentiality and respect for the circumstances, dignity and privacy of families. Generally, these personnel would only include the Principal, the Senior School Support Officer in Primary Schools or Finance Support Officers in Secondary Schools.

Families should be assured that teaching staff do not have access to the status of a family's school fee balance or their financial arrangements with the school. Steps on the part of the school will also be taken to ensure that students do not have an awareness of their parent/carer's financial situations. For this reason all **follow up** letters or correspondence will be mailed rather than handed to students to take home.

RECEIPTING OF SCHOOL FEES & DIOCESAN SCHOOL FEE AGREEMENTS

School Fees are generally due 30 days after invoicing, however, schools offer a variety of methods of payment and frequencies to provide families with flexibility to meet their commitments. These include:

METHOD	FREQUENCY
BPay, Direct Debit, Centrepay, Credit Card, Cash, Cheque and EFTPOS facilities.	Weekly, Fortnightly, Monthly

To facilitate this flexibility families must complete a Diocesan School Fee Agreement to advise the school of their intended payment option. These forms will be made available by schools at the commencement of each year with the annual school fee Invoice/Statement or upon request. A 'School Fee Calculator' is provided on each school's website to assist families determine their regular payment. Please note that fees should be paid in full by Friday, of the first week in December of each year. Parents/Carers may continue payments over the December/January period, which may result in a credit balance, if it is more convenient for them.

SIBLING DISCOUNTS APPLICABLE TO SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Sibling Discounts apply to children enrolled in Secondary schools. Sibling discounts do not apply across schools. Discounts are currently as follows:

TUITION FEES		BUILDING LEVY (SECONDARY)	
Child One	No discount	Child One	No discount
Child Two	25% Discount	Child Two	50% Discount
Child Three	50% Discount	Child Three	100% Discount
Child Four & More	100% Discount	Child Four & More	100% Discount

FAMILY COMMITMENT

Whilst no child will be denied access to a Catholic education due to **genuine** financial hardship, when families decide on a Catholic school for their children they knowingly take on additional financial responsibilities associated with school fees, which must be honoured in accordance with normal commercial practices.

It should be noted, that it is the duty of the Principal of each individual school, in accordance with the Diocesan Governance Framework, Policy and Guidelines, to manage the collection of school fees. Therefore, Principals will work closely with families to assist them to meet their commitments.

JOINT AND SEVERAL LIABILITY

When parents/carers enrol their child/children in a school within the Catholic Education system of the Diocese of Wollongong, they enter into an obligation to pay all school fees and levies. They execute this by signing the Enrolment Application. In other words, the parties that have signed the Enrolment Application form have committed to payment and responsibility for fees in a **joint and several arrangement**.

Put simply, **joint and several liability** means that each party to the enrolment application, (i.e. each person who has signed the enrolment application), is individually responsible for payment of **all** school fees and levies regardless of actual fee payer arrangements.

It should be noted that Child Support Agreements and Family Law Court Orders are agreements between parent/carers and do not impose obligations on schools in relation to invoicing nor do they negate Joint and Several Liability, therefore schools will not act on such documents in relation to school fees.

Please note from 2017:

- Schools will no longer offer the splitting of fee accounts. It is an expectation that all parties to the enrolment organise their own fee payment arrangements.

FEE CONCESSION - FAMILIES IN GENUINE FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

In keeping with Catholic social teaching, and the Gospel's imperative of a 'preferential option for the poor', the practice within Catholic Education, Diocese of Wollongong has always been to find a place for families who support its ethos, but are unable to participate in a Catholic school community without financial assistance - 'no child should be denied a Catholic education because of **genuine** financial hardship.'

For the purpose of determining eligibility for Fee Concession under these circumstances, the definition of genuine financial hardship has been determined as:

A situation where a family is unable, reasonably, because of illness, unemployment or other reasonable cause, to discharge their financial obligations to pay school fees, rather than an unwillingness to do so. Financial hardship can be of limited or long term duration.

If a family indicates that they will have difficulty with payment at the time of enrolment or at any time during their child/children's enrolment, schools will welcome the completion of a Diocesan Fee Concession Application. These are available from the administration office of each school. On submission of an application, with the required documented supporting evidence, an appointment will be made with the School Principal to discuss the matter.



The family will be advised of decision and informed in writing within **two weeks** of the interview with the Principal. **Concessions granted are subject to annual review.**

FEE CONCESSION IN CONSIDERATION OF THE FAMILY

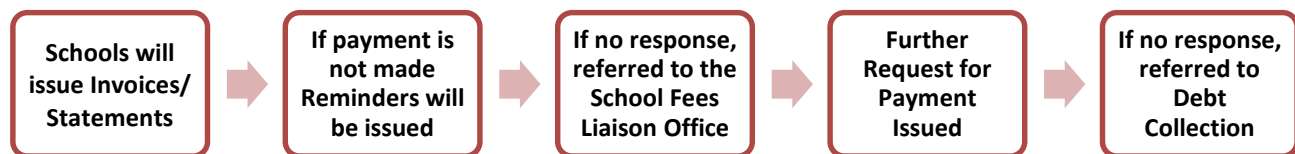
Where a family, with children in more than one Diocesan School, makes an Application for Fee Concession, a system approach, rather than an individual school approach to eligibility may be applied. The purpose of fee concession in consideration of the family allows families to attend only one interview and provide one set of documentation, thereby endeavouring to reduce stress on the family.

In these cases, prior to assessing the Fee Concession Application, the Principal of the school receiving the Application, will consult with the Principal of the other school in which the family's children are enrolled. It may also be necessary to consult the School Fees Liaison Office.

COLLECTION OF UNPAID SCHOOL FEES

Collection is the action of collecting unpaid monies. It takes place to secure payment from families who are legally bound to pay school fees. **If families have the capacity to meet their commitments and fail to do so, debt collection processes will result.**

The collection steps implemented will include school based activities with a process for referral to the School Fees Liaison Office in the event that payment is not forthcoming. This escalation may result in the account being referred to a Debt Collection Agency.



ENROLMENT APPLICATIONS FROM FAMILIES WITH OUTSTANDING SCHOOL FEE ACCOUNTS

Where an application for enrolment is received from a family who has or had an existing child or children in another systemic school in the Diocese, the enrolling school will ascertain the status of the family's school fee account before conducting an enrolment interview. This action is completed by an internal process, utilising a **Diocesan School Fee Clearance** issued by the school in which the family has or had an enrolment. This clearance process will facilitate further communications in relation to either of the following circumstances:

1. FAMILIES ENROLLING WITH AN EXISTING FEE CONCESSION ARRANGEMENT

If the family has or had an existing Fee Concession at any school due to documented financial hardship and that arrangement has been adhered to, then consideration may be given, at the discretion of the Principal of that school, as to whether fee concession on the remaining balance may be given. **Following the acquittal of existing school fee accounts, a further arrangement may then be formalised upon acceptance at the new school.**

2. FAMILIES ENROLLING WITH NO EXISTING FEE CONCESSION AND/OR FEE PAYMENT PLAN

If the family does not have a Fee Concession or Fee Payment Plan arrangement, outstanding school fee accounts must be addressed by the family with their existing school prior to the enrolment being accepted by the new school.

RELATED POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

Diocesan Enrolment Application
 Diocesan Application for Fee Concession
 Diocesan School Fee Method of Calculation
 Diocesan School Fee Payment Agreement

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