

SCHOOL FEES: SETTING AND COLLECTION

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Next Review: May 2016

1. 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, insofar as this is possible, while embodying the Church's preferential option for the poor and disadvantaged (Mandate page 50).¹ Schools have 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.

The Bishops of Western Australia have approved the collection of school fees from parents as a necessary contribution to the costs of delivering a Catholic education.

2. Definitions

2.1 School Fees:

- for the purpose of this policy statement School Fees shall be considered to be tuition fees, levies and other charges (e.g. excursions, camp fees, amenities, book hire)

2.2 Application for Enrolment Fee:

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

2.3 Acceptance of Enrolment Fee:

- the fee associated with securing a student enrolment into a school after an offer of enrolment has been made by the school

2.4 Role of School Boards or School Councils:

- in diocesan accountable schools, Boards or Councils have a managerial role with regard to the setting and collecting of school fees
- in Order accountable schools, Boards or Councils may only have an advisory role with regard to the setting and collection of school fees

3. Scope

This policy applies to St Simon Peter Catholic Primary School in Ocean Reef, Western Australia

4. Principles

- 4.1 The collection of school fees shall be approached in the spirit of Christian charity and justice.

- 4.2 Financial grounds shall never be the reason for the non-enrolment or exclusion of any child from a Catholic school.
- 4.3 The CECWA shall ensure the financial viability of group funded schools. The financial viability of Order accountable group funded schools and Order accountable non-group funded schools is ensured by the relevant Order.
- 4.4 The School Board, or School Council in the relevant Order accountable schools, has the responsibility for the financial management of the school and, consequently, is responsible for the collection of school fees.
- 4.5 Schools shall ensure that school fees reflect the socio-economic status of the school community.
- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 Families with eligible means tested family concession cards have an automatic entitlement to tuition fee concessions.
- 4.8 The withholding of access to students of normal pastoral and curriculum provision shall not be used as a fee collection strategy.
- 4.9 Every effort shall be made to protect the confidentiality of all information pertaining to parents and/or guardians and the payment of school fees.
- 4.10 Where parents and/or guardians have the capacity to pay fees, the collection of school fees shall be actively pursued.

5. Fee Collection Procedures

- 5.1 All schools shall have a written School Fees: Setting and Collection policy outlining the above principles, fee structures and collection procedures. 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 any additional charges as well as information relating to fee concessions
 - 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
 - procedures following non-payment, up to and including Judgement
 - guidelines specified in the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC) and Australian Securities & Investments Commission (ASIC) Debt Collection Guideline: for collectors and creditors

- 5.2 This policy is to be updated annually to reflect:
- a) any changes to the CECWA Policy statement ‘School Fees: Setting and Collection’
 - b) any legislative changes
 - c) any community socio-economic considerations The principal may from time to time request financial information from families to support applications for fee concessions or any other concessions

Fee Setting

- 5.3 Annual fees and charges including maximum increases shall be set by the School Board in accordance with CECWA advice provided during the budget process each year.
- 5.4 Application for Enrolment fees, if applicable to the school, shall be a maximum of \$35.00 or 1% of the annual tuition fee whichever is the greater and shall be non-refundable.
- 5.5 Diocesan accountable schools wishing to exceed the maximum increase in school fees and charges shall obtain the prior written approval of the Director of Catholic Education.
- 5.6 The CECWA decision regarding automatic tuition fee discounts for the holders of eligible means tested family concession cards shall be implemented. The fee level shall be communicated to schools by the Catholic Education Office during the budget process each year.
- 5.7 The level of sibling discounts shall be determined by each School Board or Council. As a guide, the following sibling discount levels are suggested for both primary and secondary schools

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| 1st child enrolled | 0% |
| 2nd child enrolled | 20% of that child’s tuition fee |
| 3rd child enrolled | 40% of that child’s tuition fee |
| 4th child enrolled and beyond | 100% of that child’s tuition fee |

Kindergarten fees shall be charged as a proportion (e.g. 0.4 FTE) of the respective first child full time fee. Sibling discounts apply to kindergarten students.

All students and families are eligible for sibling discounts including families who receive automatic tuition fee discounts as holders of eligible means tested family concession cards.

Fee Collection

- 5.8 Principals shall ensure that, prior to legal action, all reasonable efforts have been made to contact parents and/or guardians in order to resolve fee payment issues. Where parents and/or guardians have ignored all reasonable attempts to negotiate a fee payment strategy and further action is required:
- documentation shall be kept on each attempt to resolve the problems of outstanding fees
 - parents and/or guardians shall be notified that the services of a debt collection agency or solicitor shall be engaged to recover outstanding fees and any additional costs shall be added to the account in accordance with the School Fee Policy
 - schools shall only engage the services of a debt collection agency or solicitor who undertakes to comply with the ACCC, Trade Practices Act (TPA) and ASIC Debt Collection Guideline: for collectors and creditors

- a General Procedure Claim (summons) can be issued by the appropriate school authority via the debt collection agency engaged and judgment entered against the parent. Before enforcement proceedings are taken, such as a Property Seizure and Sale Order, Earnings Appropriation Order, or any other enforcement action, written approval shall be obtained from the Director of Catholic Education (diocesan accountable schools) or the Congregational Leader (order accountable schools)

6. References

¹Mandate of the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia 2009 - 2015

7. Related Documents

ACCC, Trade Practices Act (TPA)

Australian Competition & Consumer Commission (ACCC)

Australian Securities & Investments Commission (ASIC) Debt Collection Guideline: for collectors and creditors

8. Review

This policy is reviewed every five years.