

## SCHOOL FEES: SETTING AND COLLECTION POLICY

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*We are enterprising in the provision of facilities and resources as demanded by the pace of economic, technological, scientific and social change. In making such improvements, we are prudent in our financial outlay and in the contribution we ask from the families of students so as not to exclude those of poorer circumstances.*

*(In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat #139)*

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### 1. Rationale

The Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) and Marist Schools Australia (MSA) have a responsibility to make Catholic education available to all Catholic students whose parents seek a Catholic education for them. Newman College has a responsibility to communicate the financial constraints under which they operate to parents in order to justify the need to collect school fees from them. Parents of students at Newman College are responsible for the payment of College fees and charges and for communicating any problems, should they be unable.

### 2. 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 (eg curriculum levies or IT levies) and other charges (eg book hire, insurance, compulsory excursions, 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

### 3. Scope

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

## 4. Principles

- 4.1. Schools shall ensure that school fees reflect the social-economic status of the school community, in the context of the policy rationale
- 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 collection of school fees shall be approached in the spirit of Christian charity and justice
- 4.4. The withholding of access to students from normal pastoral and curriculum provision shall not be used as a fee collection strategy
- 4.5. 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
- 4.6. Families with eligible means tested family concession cards (Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card) have an automatic entitlement to school fee concessions
- 4.7. The confidentiality of all information pertaining to parents and/or guardians and the payment of school fees shall be maintained in legislation
- 4.8. Where parents and/or guardians have the capacity to pay fees, the collection of school fees shall be actively pursued

## 5. Procedures

- 5.1. 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 website and parent newsletters.
- 5.2. 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
- 5.3. 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; and
  - c) any community socio-economic considerations

- 5.4. The Principal may, from time to time, request financial information from families to support applications for fee concessions or any other concessions
- 5.5. 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
- 5.6. On application for admission, parents and/or guardians will be provided with the school's fee policy
- 5.7. Acknowledgement 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***

- 5.8. Enrolment deposits shall be deducted from the first semester's tuition fees in the year of enrolment. Where circumstances beyond the control of the parents result in an enrolment deposit not being paid, the Principal shall consider waiving it.

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

- 5.9. Annual school fees shall be set by the College Council during the budget process each year.
- 5.10. 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

#### ***Fee Discounts***

- 5.11. 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
- 5.12. 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.

#### ***Discounts for Families***

- 5.13. Families with siblings enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten through to Year 12 in the same Catholic School are entitled to a level of family discount that shall be determined by the College Council.
- 5.14. 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

**Fee Collection**

5.15. The College has 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, ie debit card, credit card, direct debit or bank transfer; and fortnightly, 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

5.16. 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.

5.17. The steps to be taken in relation to the collection of unpaid fees are as follows:

1. A written communication shall be sent to 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 Director Finance and Administration 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.
4. Should there be no response or action within 14 days of the letter, the Director Finance and Administration 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.
5. If despite this last letter there is no response or action, the College Principal 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 the debt collection agent is not successful in contacting the parents or in establishing a debt repayment plan, the College may consider initiating court proceedings. Before this is done, schools shall inform in writing, the Regional Director MSA.
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 Regional Director MSA.



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.
6. The Director Finance and Administration may request financial information from families to support applications for financial assistance (concessions) and/or extended credit terms
  7. Fees are billed annually at the commencement of each academic year
  8. Parents should give one term's notice in writing where appropriate should they wish to withdraw a student from the College
  9. The Director Finance and Administration should liaise with the accounts staff on a regular basis to determine the current status of the outstanding fees. Documentation shall be kept in a confidential area in the Accounts Department.

### **Associated Documentation**

CECWA Policy, School Fees: Setting and Collection