

	Topic:	School Fees: Setting and Collection
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RATIONALE

The collection and setting of school fees for St Mary's School is in keeping with CECWA Policy and is seen by the Bishops of Western Australia as a necessary contribution by parents towards the costs of delivering a Catholic Education for their children. As a Catholic school, operating as part of the Catholic Church, we have a vital mission, to provide a Catholic education for the children of all families in our Parish. As such there is an obligation on us, as a school community, to ensure that all families who desire their children to be educated in their faith can do so without fear of prejudice on the grounds of financial concerns.

There is also a recognition that State and Commonwealth funding, although significant, does not provide all of the money necessary to maintain the operation of the school. We are very much dependent upon the financial contributions of the families within the school to maintain the best possible level of educational service that we provide. There is therefore, an obligation on the part of families with children at St Mary's School to contribute to the cost of running the school. This obligation, which shall be termed 'school fees' for the purposes of this policy, incorporates tuition fees, amenities fees, various levies and other charges. These are set annually and announced to parents by the School Board at the Annual General Meeting and distributed to parents prior to the start of the school year.

School fees may be paid annually, each term, by direct debit or by individual payment schedules. All accounts are to be paid in full before the close of school in the current calendar year. In the interests of justice and equity for all members of our school community, there is the expectation that all families will contribute to the collection of school fees according to their ability to do so.

Recipients of social welfare benefits are entitled to claim a concession only on tuition fees as determined on a needs basis. An appointment with the School Administration Officer or Principal is required in each year a concession is requested. Parents experiencing financial difficulty are asked and encouraged to discuss their position with the Principal in order to negotiate a repayment schedule. Confidentiality is assured in relation to the payment of school fees and the setting of any concession or repayment schedule. This is restricted to the Principal and Administration Staff.

Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA) shall ensure the financial viability of group funded schools – this includes St Mary’s School.

Where parents have ignored all reasonable attempts to negotiate a fee repayment strategy, the school’s ‘Non-Payment of Fees Collection Procedures’ will be implemented.

DEFINITIONS

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)

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 regards to the setting and collection of school fees

PRINCIPLES

To ensure that there is equity and justice in all financial matters relating to school fee collection, the following principles will apply.

1. There is to be a direct relationship between school fees and the socio-economic status of the St Mary’s School community. Pastoral Care for school families is paramount in all decision making.
2. St Mary’s School has a written policy outlining fee structures and collection procedures.
3. The School Board has responsibility for the financial management of the school, and consequently, is responsible for the collection of school fees.
4. The collection of school fees shall be approached in the spirit of Christian charity and justice. The School Board shall actively pursue the collection of school fees where parents have the capacity to pay fees.
5. The practice of charity requires that requests for fee concessions be treated with dignity, compassion and confidentiality. Recipients of social welfare benefits should have an entitlement to claim some form of fee reduction.
6. The inability to pay school fees shall never be the reason for non-enrolment or exclusion of any child from a Catholic school once they have been enrolled in the school.
7. The inability to pay school fees will never be a reason for the withdrawal or withholding of services to the student.

8. Every effort shall be made to protect the confidentiality of all information pertaining to parents and the payment of school fees.
9. Any changes to the School Fee Policy will be communicated to parents and the school community at least four weeks prior to the proposed implementation date.

PROCEDURES

FEE SETTING:

1. Fee Setting is to be revised and updated annually to reflect:
 - Annual fees and charges including increases that are set by the School Board in accordance with CECWA advice provided during the budget process each year.
 - Any legislative changes
 - Any community socio-economic considerations
2. The Principal from time to time can request financial information from families to support applications for fee concessions or any other concession.
3. Permission must be obtained from the Director of Catholic Education if the maximum increase in school fees is to be exceeded.
4. On application for enrolment, parents will be provided with St Mary's School Parent Handbook which includes details of the school fees policy. It also sets out the details of all additional charges and information relating to the school fees policy. Clarification is to be given at the initial enrolment interview.
5. The CECWA decision regarding automatic tuition fee discounts for 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.
6. Discounts will be given for siblings also attending St Mary's School and are as suggested by CECWA:

<i>1st child</i>	<i>0%</i>
<i>2nd child</i>	<i>20%</i>
<i>3rd child</i>	<i>40%</i>
<i>4th child</i>	<i>100%</i>

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

7. The usual family discounts will also be offered for all student with special needs at St Mary's School.

FEE COLLECTION

1. The fees collection at St Mary's School will follow the following procedure:
 - Communication of fees policy at enrolment time.
 - The fees for the year will be issued at the beginning of Term One each year.
 - Accounts may be paid as one payment or four payment s (one each term) or a weekly, fortnightly or monthly direct debit payment.

- Parents experiencing hardship are contacted and a negotiated method of payment is worked out, taking into account concessions and remissions when and where required.
- There is always to be recognition of the Church's preferential option for the poor and disadvantaged.
- Reminder School Fee Statements are sent to parents during Week Six of each term with a requirement to settle in seven days.
- If fees are not paid by Week Seven, then a follow up phone call is made checking on hardships or the reason for non-payment. At this stage parents are requested to meet with the Principal to discuss the payment of the school fees.

NON-PAYMENT OF FEES COLLECTION PROCEDURES:

Where parents have made no effort to pay fees, the following procedure is to be followed:

- A letter is sent from the School Board asking the parents to make an appointment with the School Principal to discuss non-fee payment.
- When necessary, at the end of each term the School Board Fees Committee (Principal, Treasurer and Parish Priest) meet and decide on what further action (if any) is required.
- Documentation is kept (in Principal's Office) of each attempt to resolve the problem of outstanding fees.
- Parents are notified that the services of a debt collection agency or solicitor will be engaged to recover fees.
- Subsequent to the matter being dealt with and resolved by the debt collection agency, the school shall make all reasonable attempts to contact the family to arrange a meeting to discuss how such a situation may be avoided in the future. A Letter of Agreement between the school and the family, signed by both parties, would be the outcome of such a meeting.
- St Mary's School can issue a summons and judgment entered against the parent; however, before enforcement proceedings are taken, approval from the Director of Catholic Education Office must be obtained.