Global Fees Policy

Introduction

The Catholic Church's preferential option for the poor obligates Catholic schools to ensure that no baptised Catholic student is denied a Catholic education because of a family's inability to pay school fees.

"Each individual Christian and every community is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor, and for enabling them to be fully a part of society."

- Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Encyclical Letter, 187

In recognition of the differential capacity of families to contribute to the costs of education, both the Australian and State Governments incorporate needs-based elements into their recurrent funding of the Catholic school system.

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd. (CECV) policy for allocating funding to Catholic schools also accounts for need in that, all other factors being equal, schools in lower socio-economic areas receive more funding than those in higher socio-economic areas. Also, schools are provided with additional financial assistance for each student of a family who holds an eligible, means-tested Health Care Card (HCC) or Pensioner Concession Card (PCC) which enables the school to offer fee concessions.

Marist Schools Australia Ltd (MSA Ltd) acknowledges the significant contribution that individual schools make to the costs of education, through the generation of private income that includes the payment of fees by families. In recognising the role of schools in this area, and in supporting the principle of accessibility of Catholic schools through its needs-based funding formula, MSA Ltd encourages all Marists school communities to establish fee setting, collection, concession and debt recovery practices that are consistent with access and equity priorities.

Purpose

This policy outlines the process by which Lavalla Catholic College (the College) will set and collect fees, provide concessions to families experiencing financial hardship and pursue recovery of unpaid fees.

The College will provide a consistent approach as per MSA Ltd guidelines across Australia to school fee setting, fee collection, fee concessions and fee debt recovery.

This policy acknowledges the need for the College to charge and collect fees and for families to meet their fee obligations with regard to their capacity to pay.

Principles

This policy is embedded in the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and, in particular, 'The Dignity of the Human Person', 'Preferential Option for the Poor' and 'The Common Good'.

Dignity of the Human Person: Processes for the collection of school fees, granting of fee concessions and recovery of unpaid school fees need to be transparent, fair and just.

Preferential Option for the Poor: Catholic schools should be accessible to all Catholic families irrespective of capacity to pay.

The Common Good: Each Catholic school is responsible for setting its own fees taking into consideration both the private income needing to be raised and the capacity of their families to pay.

Setting of Fees

The College Fee is a Global Fee set in the previous year taking into consideration the following factors:-

1. The present level of fees;
2. The Educational Consumer Price Index;
3. The level of economic growth in the area;
4. The increasing demands for funds as a result of loans or curriculum development.

As a Catholic school we are obliged to set fees according to criteria that represent a thorough and transparent assessment of the internal and external factors influencing costs and the ability of families to pay.

The operation of a school is subject to complex regulation regarding its registration with the Victorian Registration and Qualification Authority (VRQA), charitable status and government funding eligibility. These, amongst other things, impose important restrictions on how the school applies income generated from its conduct, including school fees.

The Global Fee and its payment is discussed with parents at the time of enrolment. Relevant fee policies and guidelines are made available at that time.

Before the commencement of a new school year, the Global Fee and other charges are reviewed and approved in writing by the Canonical Administrator MSA Ltd, unless delegated in writing to the Principal.

Full Fee Paying Overseas Students (FFPOS) are required to be charged full fees (meaning Government funding plus the Global Fee) for the cost of their education as they do not attract government funding.

The Global Fee Structure does provide a discount for families with more than one student at the school.

Where a School Building Fund exists, schools may encourage contributions to the school building fund. It is important, however, that donations to the school building fund be a 'gift' in that they are freely given and do not provide any benefit to the donor. If a school imposes a mandatory contribution to the school building fund, or if payment of the same will entitle the parent to some discount to the school fees, it will not be a donation or a gift, and the school must make it clear to parents that the contribution to the school building fund levy will not be tax deductible.

Notification to Parents

There is a clear statement of College Fees in our Enrolment documents (available on the College website). The Global Fee is adjusted on an annual basis and notification of that adjustment is sent to parents prior to the end of the year. In all statements there is a clear requirement that the Global Fee be paid in full and parents sign a Fees Agreement Form. This document is the basis for collecting fees.

Enrolment Procedures

The Fees Agreement is a clear indication by families that payment of the Global Fee can be met without assistance, and enrolment can only be confirmed after receipt of this document.

A non-refundable administration fee at the current rate must be paid upon enrolment.

Global Fee

The College offers a two-tiered Global Tuition Fee that is designed to simplify families' budgets. The two-tiered system (Years 7-9 Tuition and Years 10-12 tuition) differentiates the cost of education relative to each campus and its educational program.

What is covered under this Global Fee?

The Global Fee covers all charges relating to the delivery of education such as materials fees, VET, VETis, VPC & VM, Year Level Camps & retreats.

The Global Fee is charged as at the 1st of January each year.

What is NOT covered in the Global fee?

The Global Fee does not include any extra-curricular or supplementary activities such as music camps, snow camps, private music lessons, Marist sporting carnivals and interstate or overseas trips. These activities are to be funded by families separately. Supplementary activities are voluntary in nature, are not compulsory, and do not form part of the curriculum delivery or assessment.

In order for students to be eligible for these activities, families must be on a payment plan and financially viable with their Global Fee commitments. Students receiving remission will not be eligible to attend supplementary activities.

Methods of Payment

The College accepts various methods of payment based on an agreed payment plan:

- Direct Debit or BPay payments (weekly, Fortnightly or monthly)
- Credit Card (weekly, Fortnightly or monthly)
- Other regular payments as agreed by the College

If families do not commit to one of the above payment plans, then 3 equal payments, on or before the 31st of March, 30th of June & 31st of October each year will automatically apply.

Settlement Discount

Settlement discounts apply as per the current College Global Fees and Charges brochure and are indexed in accordance with Educational CPI.

Fee Adjustment as a Result of Students Enrolling Late or Exiting Permanently

The Global Fee is adjusted on a pro-rata basis for students enrolling late or exiting permanently between Terms 1 and 3.

No adjustment is applicable for students exiting permanently in Term 4.

The Global Fee for students enrolling in Term 4 will be adjusted on a pro-rata basis.

Fee Adjustment as a Result of Interrupted Studies

The Global Fee is not adjusted on a pro-rata basis. Some residual amount is required. This payment covers some of the costs already incurred and maintains the student's enrolment at the College.

If a student is absent for more than two terms, a special holding fee of $200, plus 50% of the Global fee, is necessary to keep the place for that student.

If a student is to be absent for one whole term, the Global fee is reduced by 25% provided that at least one month's notice is given for reasons other than sickness.

If a student is absent for seven or more weeks within a term or across two terms, a reduction of 15% is made on the Global Fee, provided that one month's notice is given for reasons other than sickness.

If anyone wishes to apply for Interrupted Studies they should contact the College Registrar.

Child Custody Situations

The Family Law Act is not an act concerned with education, but sometimes matters arising under the Act can impinge on the relationship between the College and its students and/or parents.

Amendments to the Family Law Act in 1996 abolish the terms "custody", "guardianship" and "access". The emphasis is now on parental responsibility, which can be exercised separately by both parents. Subject to Family Court Orders, both parents have equal parental responsibility in respect of a child. The College does not take sides in a dispute between parents, nor does it try to settle family disputes over fee payment. The College therefore regards both parents as jointly liable for fees and continues to send one account.

When faced with a dispute, the College must ask for a copy of any existing legally approved Parenting Order or Parenting Plan. On receipt of the Parenting Order or Parenting Plan, the College will arrange to send the account to the parent nominated in the Order or Plan.

Lavalla Catholic College Fees Committee

The Fees Committee meets regularly to review matters associated with fee collection, and matters referred to it by the Finance Officer and the Business Manager. It views a list of debtors to identify appropriate actions, and reviews fee relief applications, including the recommended write off of bad debts. The Committee consists of the Principal, Business Manager, Assistant Business Manager, Finance Officer and a Advisory Council member representative.

Fee Remission

Families can apply for fee remission due to financial hardship and can request a reduction of the Global Fee or a deferment in payment.

The College considers the range of government allowances that may be available to families in assisting them in financing the costs of education. However, if families can provide reasonable verification of the hardship, the College is prepared to maintain the enrolment of the student and to come to some clear arrangement concerning fee relief. All applications for remission must be submitted for review each year, as circumstances can change from one year to the next. Applications for remission are encouraged to be submitted by the 31st of October each year.

Criteria for the Determination of Financial Hardship

1. Eligibility for a Health Care Card;
2. Assessment of assets and liabilities (ie: car, caravan, investment, mortgages, loans and other debts);
3. Net Family Assessable Income as per individual Income Tax Return, current payslips and Centrelink Income Statement;
4. Employment or medical status of one or both parents;
5. Number and Year Level of School Age Children.
6. Other unexpected costs and other cost demands and activities.
7. Whether the parent is in receipt of Government assistance.

Recovery of Unpaid Fees

All families are expected to meet their Global Fee obligations.

Where parents who have the financial means, refuse to pay the Global Fee, every effort must be made to help them understand their obligations and the impact that non-payment has on the College's ability to provide a quality education for all students.

It is a matter of justice to all families that all available steps are taken to ensure that the Global Fee is paid.

The recovery of unpaid Global Fees must be approached pastorally, compassionately and sensitively, to protect the student as much as possible.

At all times in the recovery of unpaid Global Fees, the Canonical Administrator should be kept informed.

After all other measures to recover Global Fees have been exhausted, legal proceedings may be considered.

The written approval of our Governors, Marist Schools Australia, must be obtained before any court action is initiated. The Director and the Bishop, Diocese of Sale, must also be notified if legal proceedings eventuate.

The judgment as to whether parents are unable to pay because of their financial situation must err on the side of leniency.

The College should make every effort to monitor and manage Global fee payments to avoid school fee debt accumulating.