

HARDSHIP POLICY

PURPOSE

To ensure that families experiencing hardship are aware of options and support available so that every child has access to educational opportunities and is not disadvantaged or excluded.

RATIONALE

The Victorian community shares a vision to build an education system that champions excellence and ensures that every child and young person has access to the opportunities to succeed in life, regardless of their background or circumstances. Hardship refers to the inability to pay due to financial difficulties or circumstances. This can be temporary financial difficulty due to a sudden unexpected change of circumstances; as a result of low and/or fixed income which leads to ongoing financial difficulty or a combination of low income and unexpected change in circumstances. The MPHPS Hardship Policy reflects a proactive strategy to discreetly support families experiencing unexpected loss, illness, job loss, relationship changes and those experiencing longer term hardship.

EARLY IDENTIFICATION THROUGH COMMUNICATION

MPHPS understands that at times families may experience financial difficulty or hardship and may find requests for payment stressful. Families are encouraged to contact Leeann Ferris (Finance Officer) in the school office, on 9436 8866 or ferris.leeann.m@edumail.vic.gov.au for a confidential discussion and plan of support or the Principal if they prefer.

STRATEGY TO SUPPORT PARENTS

Early identification is critical in supporting families to manage financial hardship so MPHPS may employ such proactive strategies as:

Through classroom teachers:

- Ensure students are attending school and monitor any unusual absences
- Ensure students have brought lunch/snacks to school
- Observe any sudden changes to students health and wellbeing
- Ensure parents from non-English speaking backgrounds understand notices and information or let the office know to organise free translation service
- Communicate with parent any concerns and offer support in a respectful manner
- Confidentially bring any concerns to the Principal class
- Observe if notices for payment and permission forms e.g. for excursions, camps, activities are not returned and bring it to the attention of the Finance Officer confidentially
- Encourage the parent to speak to the Finance Officer, Business Manager or Principal confidentially if there appears to be a preference to keep the student home which may indicate hardship

Through the office team:

- Ensure information on payment options is available, accessible and easily understood to all parents so that they know what to expect and what supports they can access
- Ensure those from non-English speaking backgrounds understand the information or organise a free translation service
- Ensure parents are provided with early notice of annual payment requests for Booklists (i.e. a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous school year) and 1-1 Netbook payment requests (6 weeks prior to due date). This enables parents to save and budget accordingly
- Ensure parents are provided with reasonable notice of any other payment requests that arise during the school year including camps, excursions and incursions - ensuring parents have a clear understanding of the full financial contribution being sought
- Be sensitive to any change communicated by the parent which may indicate hardship
- Ensure the status and details of any financial arrangements are kept confidential and only shared with relevant school personnel
- Ensure parents experiencing hardship are not pursued for outstanding school fees from one year to the next
- MPHPS will not use debt collectors to obtain outstanding school funds owed to the school from parents
- Issue only one reminder notice to parents for voluntary financial contributions per year

- Invoices/statements for unpaid essential items, or optional items accepted by parents, are not generated more than monthly or according to the parent payment arrangement with the school.

Through the Principal Class and Wellbeing team:

- Ensure staff are aware of the MPHPS Hardship Policy
- Ensure parents experiencing hardship are aware of the support available to avoid stress, disengagement and avoidance
- Ensure families feel they can approach the school to discuss their concerns and be supported in a respectful and confidential manner
- Ensure the student's access to educational opportunities is not impacted

SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

Consideration to hardship arrangements in respect to payment requests is provided to families experiencing long term hardship or short term crisis on a confidential, case by case basis. Families are encouraged to contact Leeann Ferris (Finance Officer) in the school office, on 9436 8866 or ferris.leeann.m@edumail.vic.gov.au for a confidential discussion and plan of support, or the Principal, Deborah Patterson on 9436 8866 or patterson.deborah.a@edumail.vic.gov.au if they prefer.

MPHPS hardship arrangements include a proactive approach to providing support for parents experiencing financial difficulty and include:

- CSEF
- State Schools Relief
- Payment Plans
- Reduced or subsidised fees
- Waiving of fees
- Attendance at excursions/camps/sports from Student Welfare funds for those not eligible for CSEF
- Provision of food
- Provision of second hand uniform\
- use of student netbook in school
- Agency funding sought where available

COMMUNICATION

MPHPS Hardship Policy will be published on the school website at www.millparkhtsps.vic.edu.au or a copy may be requested from the school office.

General enquiries regarding any payment requests can be made to the office in person or by phoning 9436 8866. All of our friendly staff in the office are able to assist with general enquiries. Concerns should be directed to Julie Findley, Business Manager on 9436 8866 or findley.julie.j@edumail.vic.gov.au who will be happy to discuss or answer any queries regarding the Parent Payment Policy or MPHPS Booklist.

REVIEW OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

MPHPS School Council approves, monitors and reviews annually the Hardship Policy to ensure:

- Access, equity and inclusion
- Affordability
- Engagement and support
- Respect and confidentiality
- Transparency and accountability.

In the review process School Council will identify any factors to be taken into account, including any concerns raised by the school community and will notify any changes to the Hardship Policy annually via the school website www.millparkhtsps.vic.edu.au and newsletter.

Date of approval by School Council

19/2/2018