Purpose

This policy outlines the Catholic Schools Office expectations in relation to the establishment and collection of school fees in Diocesan Schools.

Policy Statement

1. SCHOOL FEES COMPONENTS

School Fees in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle typically include Tuition Fees, the Diocesan Family School Buildings Levy (DF&SBL), Enrolment Fees and other local charges.

Tuition Fees, the Diocesan Family & School Building Levy and Enrolment Fees are set out in the Schedule of Diocesan School Fees published each year. This schedule is to be supplemented by the school to include rates and implementation of local charges.

A significant proportion of a school’s operational expenditure is met by Tuition fees and local charges.

1.1 Tuition Fees

School Tuition Fees are set by the Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle each year on advice from the Diocesan Finance Council. Schools collect these fees to assist with operating costs but are then recharged a per capita levy from the Catholic Schools Office to assist with the costs of salaries, workers compensation insurance, public liability insurance, student accident insurance and other operating expenditure.

1.2 Diocesan Family & School Building Levy

The Diocesan Family & School Building Levy is set by the Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle each year on advice from the Diocesan Finance Council. The levy is charged per family and is collected by the school at which the eldest student in the family is enrolled. On receipt, these funds are then passed onto the DF&SBL central bank account.

Income from the Diocesan Family & School Building Levy contributes to the capital costs of school facilities provided by the Catholic Schools Office and helps to bridge the gap between government grants and the cost of providing suitable facilities in Diocesan schools.
1.3 General Resources and Services Fee

The General Resources and Services Fee is set at the school level by the Principal in consultation with staff, parents, parish priest and the Catholic Schools Office and is used to pay for school resources, educational activities, specific subject charges and amenities.

In establishing this fee Principals need to be mindful of the schools' parents and carer's capacity to support the funding of school operations. A balance should be sought whereby fees and charges represent a reasonable understanding and expectation of parents and carers without diminishing services provided. Local fees, charges and levies should be amalgamated where practical to avoid parents and carers being invoiced multiple times.

As a guide, General Resources and Service Fees should reflect the following aspects of the school's operations:

- Resource fee
- School based services incorporating grounds maintenance, cleaning and IT support
- Excursions, incursions and sport incorporating compulsory education and curriculum initiatives

General Resources and Services Fees are related to the current school year and should not be charged in advance for future years to ensure that income is matched to when the service is provided and costs incurred.

1.4 Enrolment Fees

The Enrolment Fee is a fixed fee payable upon confirmation of enrolment.

The Enrolment Fee covers the cost of administrative work involved in processing applications for enrolment and is credited against the General Resources - Service Fee component of the students' School Fees account on commencement of attendance.

The Enrolment Fee is non-refundable except in special circumstances and at the discretion of the Principal.

2. FAMILY DISCOUNT

Tuition Fee discounts are provided for families with more than one child attending Catholic schools in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle. Students within a family group residing at the same address across Diocesan Schools are entitled to Family discounts dependent upon the number of attending students.

3. TUITION FEES FOR YEAR 12 STUDENTS

Although students enrolled in the final calendar year of Year 12 have less attendance weeks relative to students in other scholastic years, the full annual tuition fee is still applicable.

4. FEE CONCESSIONS

Inability to pay school fees does not exclude a child of a family genuinely committed to Catholic faith and practice from attending a Catholic school in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

Arrangements for fee concessions are available to parents/carers in situations where pressing financial circumstances mean that it is impossible for them to make full fee payments including the Diocesan Family & School Building Levy.

In addition to details outlined in the following sub-clauses, further details regarding the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle Health Care Card / Pension Concession Card Tuition Fee Discount Scheme and an application form are provided as Appendix 2 of this policy.

Requests for fee concessions, other than on the basis of Health Care Card / Pension Concession Card, require an interview with the School as part of the assessment of the request.

The value of the fee reduction will be determined after due consideration, taking into account all relevant circumstances and the advice from the Parish Priest, if appropriate and applicable.
Apart from fixed Tuition Fee concessions for holders of Health Care Card / Pension Concession Card, fee concessions are to be applied pro-rata across all components of School Fees. For example, if a 40% concession is offered each component fee, including the Diocesan Family & School Building Levy, is reduced by 40%.

Once agreement has been reached in relation to applications for School Fee concessions a formal document outlining the terms of the agreement should be drawn up and signed by the School Principal and the parents/carers.

A copy of the agreement should be provided to the parents/carers and the original kept on file at the school. Any subsequent alterations to the agreement should be recorded in the same manner.

4.1 Health Care Card / Pension Concession Card

Families in which parents hold a valid Health Care Card / Pension Concession Card and who are experiencing genuine financial hardship are able to apply for a special concession for the tuition fees component of their children’s school fees account.

The level of concession is set out in the Diocesan School Fees Schedule published each year.

Parents seeking fee concession on this basis are required to complete an “Application for School Fee Concession” form available from the School Finance Officer. Tuition fees are adjusted on receipt and processing of the completed application form.

Diocesan School Principals may, at their discretion, include an interview in the processing of an application for tuition fee concession by parents who hold Health Care / Pension Cards.

5. Tuition Fee Refunds for Students Withdrawing from School

Parents and/or carers may apply for a refund of tuition fees paid in advance when students are withdrawn from a Diocesan school, relative to the date of enrolment ceasing.

The following general principles apply to the refund of tuition fees:

- Written notification of a student’s withdrawal from a Diocesan school is to be provided to the Principal as soon as possible.
- Refunds are applicable to the tuition fee component of school fees only
- Parents and/or carers are required to make written application to the School Finance Officer for a refund of tuition fees paid in advance of enrolment ceasing
- Tuition fees equivalent to two school weeks’ or less in advance will not be refunded

Refunds are based on the tuition fee per week.

Tuition fee refunds for students withdrawing in the final calendar year of Year 12 are to be calculated relative to the formal attendance period. For example, if a Year 12 student withdraws from school in week 4 of term 3, the refund of tuition fees, if applied for, would be based on the remaining weeks of term 3 and will not include term 4.

Definitions

- **Health Care Card holder** means holders of a means tested family Health Care Card.
- **Pension Concession Card holders** means holders of a means tested Pensioner Concession Card.

Scope

This policy applies to the Catholic Schools Office and all Diocesan schools.
Guiding Principles

Catholic schools have provided education for young Australians for over one hundred years and throughout this time have supported parents and/or carers in their roles as the first educators of their children. In choosing a Catholic school for their children, parents are aware that they will be required to make a significant financial contribution towards the cost of the provision of their education.

Schools in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle have been established by the generosity of parents, parishioners, religious congregations and staff. Funding of Diocesan schools is shared between Commonwealth and State Governments, parents and parishes. The financial support of parents through the payment of fees is an essential component of addressing the discrepancy between government funding and the cost of providing quality educational experiences and achieving quality educational outcomes for students in Diocesan schools.

Primary schools in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle have been established on properties owned by parish communities and as such the role of the parish and parish priest in the operation of the schools is paramount.

The practice of setting school fee levels in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle is underpinned by Catholic social justice principles and the Church’s mission to the poor. Interactions with families in relation to school fee matters should be respectful, just and compassionate. The values and ethos that underpin Catholic education may require families to be afforded the benefit of any doubt arising in relation to this policy.

• No family who supports the Catholic ethos should be denied a place at a Catholic school because of an inability to pay full fees.
• School Principals, using the guidelines outlined in this policy, are responsible for identifying and supporting families who may require assistance.
• School fee processes and practices actions are to be just, respectful, compassionate and transparent.
• The withholding of students’ access to curriculum and pastoral provision is not to be used as a fee collection strategy.
• Details of families’ financial circumstances are to remain confidential to those authorised to access such information and should not be identifiable publicly through any school practices such as book collections and excursions.
• Where parents have the capacity to pay school fees, the collection of such is to be actively pursued in accordance with this policy.

Budget

Budget allocations will be required to support the communication and periodic review of this policy.

Responsibilities

Catholic Schools Office

The Catholic Schools Office, under the leadership of the Director of Schools is responsible for:

• Promoting the determination of Catholic education to respond to the needs of the poor and underprivileged in our society.
• Exercising sound overall financial responsibility so that school fees are able to set at such a level that Catholic education is accessible to all Catholic families within the Diocese.
• Establishing a clear and just School Fee Policy for Diocesan Catholic schools
• Advising and supporting Diocesan schools in relation to the implementation of the Diocesan School Fee Policy.
• Ensuring Catholic Schools Office and school personnel meet their responsibilities appropriately in relation to School Fees management.
• Supporting school Principals with the financial management of schools and annual review of school budgets, particularly in relation to the impact on school fee levels.
School Principals

Diocesan School Principals are responsible for:

- Ensuring the Diocesan School Fee Policy is implemented in a just and respectful manner.
- Implementing school based aspects of the policy efficiently and appropriately.
- Ensuring school based processes and practices are consistent with the Diocesan School Fee Policy.
- Providing parents and carers clear information about all school fees and other charges.
- Exercising oversight of the school fees process, including collection of outstanding fees and the review of debtors.
- Advising school personnel of the underpinning values and Catholic ethos that must guide interactions with families and processes and practices in relation to school fees.
- Responding to any concerns raised by parents and/or carers in relation to school fee matters.
- Developing and maintaining an annual budget, including income generated by school fees, that demonstrates effective and sustainable financial management of the school.

Parents and Carers

Parents and carers are responsible for:

- Paying school fees in accordance with the Diocesan School Fee Policy and school based processes and practices.
- Dealing honestly with Diocesan schools and the Catholic Schools Office.
- Respecting the circumstances of other parents and/or carers in Diocesan school communities.

Legislative/Professional Guidelines

Australian Education Act 2013
Australian Education Regulation 2013
Education Act 1990 (NSW)
NSW Government Not-for-profit Guidelines for Non-Government Schools
Appendix 1

Health Care Card / Pension Concession Card Tuition Fee Discount Scheme

BACKGROUND

Fee reductions for economically disadvantaged families have always been provided by Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

In its efforts to always strive to do more in fulfilling its mission within the Church, the Catholic Schools Office introduced the Health Care Card / Pension Concession Card Tuition Fee Discount Scheme in 2007.

The aims of the scheme are twofold:

1. To reduce the financial burden on families with limited financial resources with children currently in the Diocesan schools
2. To reduce the financial barrier that may prevent some Catholic families from accessing a Catholic education for their children

It is hoped that accessing a fee reduction under this scheme will be an uncomplicated process for those in need and that the application of a consistent approach across all schools will increase awareness of the policy and practice.

The scheme provides a sliding scale of discounts graduating to a maximum of 50% for a family group with 5 or more children attending Diocesan schools after any family discount is calculated.

The Health Care Card / Pension Concession Card Tuition Fee Discount Scheme does not preclude families who do not hold either a Health Care Card or Pension Concession Card but may be experiencing financial difficulty nonetheless from seeking assistance with the payment of school fees. These families are encouraged to contact the school Principal to discuss their circumstances.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this scheme:

Health Care Card holder means holders of a means tested family Health Care Card;

Pension Concession Card holders means holders of a Pensioner Concession Card with the code PPS, ie, single parents receiving a Parenting Payment Single allowance

APPLICATION PROCESS

Eligible card holders need to request a copy of the Application for Health Care Card / Pension Card Tuition Fee Discount from the school Finance Officer. Cardholders are required to show their card as evidence of eligibility prior to the application form being provided.

Completed application forms should be returned to the school Finance Officer for processing.

The applicable reduction will automatically be applied to tuition fees once the application form has been processed.
CONDITIONS

1. The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle Health Care Card / Pension Concession Card Tuition Fee Discount Scheme is open to families holding Commonwealth Health Care Cards and/or Pension Concession Cards. Fee discounts will be applied for either parent cardholder in separated families.

2. The Fee discount applies to the Tuition Fee component of school fees only.

3. The scheme is open to families of students currently enrolled in a Diocesan school and/or students new to the Diocese.

4. Entitlement to tuition fee discount applies for one (1) year. Applications for subsequent years need to be renewed at the commencement of each school year.

EXCLUSIONS

The Diocesan Family & School Building Levy and any fees charged at the local school level (e.g., curriculum, sport, excursions, service levies, consumables etc) are not automatically discounted under this scheme. Applications for discounts for these fees need to be discussed separately between the school Principals and parents and/or carers.

Students who hold their own Health Care Cards do so because of their own personal health needs and not because of their family’s income. A student Health Care Card is not acceptable evidence of eligibility for the Health Care Card / Pension Concession Tuition Fee Discount Scheme.
Appendix 2

Health Care Card / Pension Concession Card Tuition Fee Discount Scheme - Frequently Asked Questions

Who can access the Health Care Card / Pension Concession Card Tuition Fee Discount Scheme?

For the purposes of this scheme eligible card holders are those who hold either

- A means tested family Health Care Card
  - These cards should show the names of parents and dependent children under the age of 16 years
- Pension Concession Card with the code PPS
  - I.e., single parents receiving a Parenting Payment Single allowance

The scheme is open to Catholic and non-Catholic families and current and/or new students.

Which concession cards are not eligible under this scheme?

Holders of the following cards are not automatically eligible to make application under this scheme:

- Students in receipt of ABSTUDY allowance
  - These students are able to access alternative government support
- Cards issued under the Mobility Allowance (MOB) category, and/or disability, carer or age related cards
- Department of Veterans Affairs Pensioner Concession Cards

The aim of this scheme is to assist families with limited financial resources. Hence only holders of cards with lower income means test requirements are automatically eligible.

What if I have the wrong card or no card?

Parents and/or carers who do not hold either a Health Care Card or a Pension Concession Card but have limited financial resources should apply to the Principal for assistance with school fees.

Parents and/or carers who make application for fee assistance should be asked to provide information to assist the school to assess their application.

Holders of other Centrelink cards should obtain an Income Statement from Centrelink to support their application. Income statements can be obtained via the Centrelink website, or by phoning or visiting a Centrelink office.

Is this a Government initiative?

No.

This is an initiative of the Catholic Schools Office in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle aimed at reducing the financial burden of tuition fees on families with limited financial resources and reducing the financial barrier that could prevent some Catholic families from accessing a Catholic education for their children.
What fees does this scheme cover?
This scheme discounts tuition fees only.
It does not cover the Diocesan Family & School Building Levy or other charges for camps, excursions, book hire, insurance, subject levies or sport etc.
Parents and/or carers should meet with the school Principal if assistance is required with these fees and charges.

How much are Tuition Fees discounted under this scheme?
Tuition fees are discounted in accordance with the number of children enrolled in diocesan schools in a particularly family group. The sliding scale of discounts graduates to a maximum of 50% for a family group with 5 or more children attending Diocesan schools.

What do I need to do to access this Scheme?
Parents and/or carers need to complete an application form, available from school Principals, and show their card to confirm eligibility for the scheme. Further checks may be required if or when the card expires to re-confirm eligibility.
Parents and/or carers enrolling a student in a Diocesan school for the first time should wait until enrolment has been confirmed before making an application for Tuition Fee discount under this scheme.

How does the scheme apply to custodial and/or non-custodial parents?
Tuition Fee discount is available under this scheme if the person responsible for payment of school fees is a Health Care Card holder.
In cases where there is joint responsibility for payment of school fees, and only one parent holds a Health Care Card, the Tuition Fee discount under this scheme will apply only to the holder of the Health Care Card.
If the parent responsible for the payment of school fees does not hold a Health Care Card or a Pension Concession Card but has limited financial resources, application for fee assistance should be made to the school Principal.

Could children of Health Care Card holders be prevented from gaining a place in the Diocesan school of the parent and/or carer’s choice because of their inability to pay full fees?
Enrolment procedures as outlined in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle Student Enrolment Policy will be followed.
Application for the Health Care Card / Pension Concession Card Tuition Fee Discount Scheme is not made until after enrolment has been confirmed.
What happens if a parent and/or carer becomes eligible for a Health Care Card after the beginning of a school year?
Parents and/or carers can make application under this scheme as soon as they are issued with a Health Care Card.

If this occurs after the commencement of the school year the fee discount will be applied to tuition fee accounts for the remainder of the year. As an example, if the Health Care Card is issued in June, the parents and/or carers will have paid full fees for two (2) terms and will be invoiced at the discounted rate for the remaining two (2) terms.

What happens if the parents and/or carers pay Tuition Fees for the full school year and their Health Care Card becomes invalid or is not renewed part way through the year?
Parents should inform the school immediately if their Health Care Card becomes invalid or is not renewed.

A new Tuition Fee account will be issued to cover the additional fees required.

Does receiving a Tuition Fee discount under this scheme mean that students are unable to participate in school activities, trips and excursions?
No.

Participation in school activities is not affected by this scheme.

Parents and/or carers should be aware however that the discount that applies to Tuition Fees under this scheme does not apply to other fees and charges including excursions.

Where can schools or parents and/or carers find out more about Health Care Cards?
Health Care Cards are issued through the Department of Human Services.

Further information can be obtained from the Department’s at