

Schools Must Stop Exploiting Parents

The NSW *Education Act 1990* states that the Government is to provide a high standard of education in government schools free of charge. Therefore, P&C Federation is calling on the NSW Government to waive the practice of asking parents for voluntary contributions, and prior to this reform the ways schools ask parents for these contributions.

One of the driving philosophies of public education is to be free of fees, yet parents in many schools are pressured to pay their school each year. Schools frequently ask parents for voluntary contributions in the form of invoices, which leave parents with the impression that these contributions are compulsory. Some schools ask parents to provide for their children's stationery, while also stating that their voluntary contributions will be used for stationery.

P&C Federation President Susie Boyd commented "In the government school sector, it's the responsibility of governments, not parents, to ensure that children have access to proper facilities and services. This is particularly important in light of the rising costs of living for parents and the fact that parents across the state are currently struggling under the crippling drought."

"Contributions and fundraising from parents can make great differences for children in schools. However, public education is supposed to be equitable and without fees, so families should not feel pressured to provide funds or equipment."

The right to free primary school education is codified in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which Australia has signed.

Ms Boyd commented, "The practice of asking for voluntary contributions is being abused by schools using high-pressure tactics on parents to collect funds, so the Government should instruct schools to cease the practice, and then take that opportunity to put in place strict policies for schools guidance in collection of funds."

"This must include making unambiguously clear to parents that the contributions are optional, and strict rules that any contributions must enhance educational opportunities for students, rather than merely fund the delivery of the defined curriculum."

In the meantime, if school principals feel their school is lacking funds for facilities or services, they should partner with parents and families to pressure the government."

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