

Newcastle Waldorf School

Policy for supporting families experiencing hardship

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to proactively support students and their families who are experiencing short and long term hardships which reduces their ability to maintain regular fee payment.

Scope

This policy primarily seeks to address hardship by reducing the financial burdens on families, however other non-financial options will be considered. This support is available to families of all students enrolled at the school or past students who are still active within the school community or staff with children at the school.

Policy Statement

The Newcastle Waldorf School seeks to ensure children can participate fully in the learning experience and the life of the school.

The school will provide, where possible, appropriate support to families of students who are experiencing hardship and as a consequence are limited in their ability to pay fees.

The school's hardship programme will be available to all families of students and includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Flexible payment plans
- Deferred payment or the extension of payment deadlines
- Access to casual paid work opportunities at the school
- Reduced fees
- Waiving fees

Any member of staff who becomes aware of a family's hardship is in the position to inform the family that the school has a hardship policy and that their situation can be taken confidentially to the appropriate people at the family's discretion. These people are the leadership team and office manager.

Negotiations about appropriate forms of financial or non-financial assistance will proceed on a case-by-case basis and include the family and at least two people from the leadership team. The final decision will be made by the leadership team.

Parents/Guardians experiencing hardship who approach the school can expect to:

- Be treated with respect, dignity, sensitivity and without judgement
- Have their circumstances individually considered
- Have their identity and circumstances kept confidential to the relevant school personnel
- Nominate a support person to accompany them to any meetings with parent payment contact persons
- Receive prompt information on the support options available from the school
- Discuss the amount they can afford and negotiate the terms of payment
- Revisit their parent payment plan at any point during the school year
- Receive free access to a language interpreter service if required

Parents/Guardians who engage with the school to discuss hardship should be encouraged to:

- Advise the school of their financial difficulties as soon as practicable
- Act reasonably in their negotiations with the School in pursuit of a mutually acceptable outcome
- Be honest and realistic in their assessment of their capacity to contribute to their child's school fees.
- Advise the School if their circumstances change as soon as practicable
- Maintain contact with the School if this is required

Responsibilities

The policy will be developed and implemented by the leadership team, and reviewed and approved by the School Board.

Implementation

The leadership team will develop procedures to ensure communication and administrative actions are implemented.

The office manager will ensure accounting practices and procedures are in place to manage and monitor any financial assistance provided.

Compliance, monitoring and review

The School Board will undertake an annual review of the policy and its activities.

Reporting

Regular reports on policy implementation will be provided during the Principal's report at each School Board meeting. This will include reporting on the number and on status of impacted families, feedback received on the policy, and reporting on costs.

Definitions

Hardship

Hardship refers to an inability to pay due to financial difficulty or circumstance.

Hardship can arise from a variety of situations that can be either short or long term. Hardship is not necessarily related to the income of the family but can result from contributing stressors, which can impact a family's ability to make financial payments.

Hardship can be experienced as a result of a sudden change in circumstances, which leads to temporary financial difficulty; as a result of a low and/or fixed income, which leads to ongoing financial difficulty; or from a combination of low income, and an unanticipated change in circumstances.

While some families may require flexibility and temporary assistance, such as an extension of time to pay or flexible payment arrangements, other families may not expect their situation to improve in the foreseeable future and will instead require ongoing support over a longer period.