# out-of-home care: assistance with education expenses

This paper provides advice on funding support programs that may be available to assist with education expenses for students in court-ordered out-of-home care placements

## school fees

### What does a free access to instruction include?

Victorian government schools must teach the standard curriculum to all students for free. This covers prep to year 12.

Schools may ask parents/carers to pay for Essential Student Learning Items to help the student access the school’s delivery of the standard curriculum. Your school will decide what those items are and give you a list.

In some cases the school will provide these essential items, and you pay the school. You can choose to provide some items yourself. Check with the school first to make sure the item is correct.

Essential Student Learning Items include:

* textbooks and stationery that your child uses and keeps
* materials used for schoolwork where your child keeps the final product. For example, wood used in a woodworking class.
* excursions or work placements that all students must attend
* devices such as laptops and tablets that are for the exclusive use of the student

### What assistance is available to help with fees?

Schools must develop arrangements that support families experiencing financial hardship.

Arrangements should consider but not be limited to:

* tailored payment plans, waiving, reducing or extending payment deadlines
* referrals to Victorian Government or community support programs
* Schools must communicate arrangements so that all families are well informed.

### What happens if I can’t pay the school fees?

The [Parent Payments Policy](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/parent-payment/policy) states that schools cannot:

* deny students access to the standard curriculum if any payments are not made
* harass or coerce parents to make payments
* carry over debts for purchased items and completed activities to the following school year unless otherwise agreed
* charge penalty fees
* use a debt collector to recover outstanding payments
* deny students access to Optional Items if payment has not been received for Essential Student Learning Items

## state schools relief

### What can it help with?

[State Schools' Relief](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/stateschoolsrelief.aspx?Redirect=1) (SSR) is a charitable non-government organisation, supported by the Department, which provides assistance with uniforms and other essential learning items for students who need financial assistance to continue their education.

SSR assistance will be provided by either direct supply of uniform items or uniform vouchers for redemption from school uniform suppliers.

### Who is eligible?

Any Victorian government school student who is experiencing financial disadvantage because of short-term crisis or long-term chronic need and requires assistance with the cost of uniform items, such as shirts, jumpers and shoes, or other essential items such as stationery packs.

In addition, Year 7 and Prep students in government schools who receive Camps, Sports and Excursions funding are automatically eligible for a school uniform pack.

### How can I apply?

Principals (or their authorised delegate) make a needs-based assessment for individual students using the eligibility criteria determined by SSR before using the SSR online application portal to make individual requests for assistance on behalf of students.

If the student is going into Prep or Year 7 and receives Camps, Sports and Excursions funding, ask your school to apply for the uniform pack. More information is available [here](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/going-to-school/Pages/uniforms.aspx).

Speak to your school to apply for help. You can talk about your situation with:

* the school principal
* assistant principal, or
* a student welfare coordinator.

They will work out what you can receive and put in an application for you.

## camps, sports and excursions

### What can it help with?

The [Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/csef.aspx) (CSEF) provides payments for eligible students to attend activities like:

* school camps or trips
* swimming and school-organised sport programs
* outdoor education programs
* excursions and incursions.

Payments are made directly to the school and are tied to the student.

### Who is eligible?

Carers are eligible to apply and students in statutory out-of-home care are eligible and given special consideration.

### How can you apply?

Applications need to be made in Term 1 or 2. Applications are made through the school and application forms can be found on the Department of Education and Training [website](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/csef.aspx). If an application has been made the previous year and circumstances have not changed, the school can resubmit the application on the carer’s behalf.

## conveyance allowance

### What can it help with?

The [conveyance allowance](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/conveyance-allowance/policy) provides a contribution towards transport costs for students in rural and regional Victoria and those attending specialist schools (government or non-government). It is intended to assist, but not to cover the full cost of transporting children to and from school.

The costs can include travelling by public transport or by private car, motorbike, bicycle or bus.

### Who is eligible?

The allowance is available where the student:

* lives in rural and regional Victoria and attends their nearest appropriate school/campus, or
* attends an eligible specialist school
* whose nearest school is not serviced by a free school bus provided under the School Bus Program.

### How can you apply?

Schools are responsible for providing families with information about the conveyance allowance including application forms and information about eligibility.

## scholarships

### What are scholarships for?

The Department of Education and Training administers a range of scholarships, which contribute to the cost of participation in government schools. While the scholarships are awarded on merit, based on school results and participation in school and community activities, a prerequisite for eligibility is financial need.

More information is available on the Department of Education and Training [website](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/learning/Pages/student-scholarships.aspx).