

# School Levies and Charges and the expanded Student Assistance Scheme

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### *Expansion of the Student Assistance Scheme*

What is the Student Assistance Scheme (STAS)?

STAS provides financial assistance for eligible families, by waiving the cost of school levies. It is provided through school and college resourcing, rather than direct to families.

What did the expansion of STAS mean for families?

From Term 1, 2021 all families holding a current Centrelink Health Care Card, Centrelink Low Income Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card became eligible for STAS. The broadening of the Scheme has meant that more Tasmanian families are eligible for assistance with school levies.

What does STAS cover?

Families who are eligible for STAS do not need to pay levies. Levies include costs for items and services that are required to complete the normal educational instruction at the school.

Families eligible for STAS are also eligible for the Spectacles Assistance Scheme, which provides financial assistance towards the purchase of spectacles for students who require them from participating optometrists.

STAS does not cover the cost of uniforms. The Department of Education has a School Uniform Exceptional Assistance Scheme for students in exceptional or extenuating family circumstances. For more information on this please contact the social worker at your child's school.

### I am currently receiving STAS. Do I need to reapply?

Most parents who currently receive STAS will not need to provide any additional information and will not need to reapply. You cannot apply online or add additional students in the online application form if you are already receiving STAS. If you wish to add a newly enrolling child to your existing STAS file, please email the details to [stas@education.tas.gov.au](mailto:stas@education.tas.gov.au).

### Are students with their own Health Care Card eligible for STAS?

If a student who is under 18 holds their own Health Care Card, is recognised as independent by Centrelink (meaning they are responsible for themselves) and is enrolled as an independent student, they are eligible for STAS.

Students holding their own Health Care Card *without* independent status are not automatically eligible for STAS. Eligibility is based on their parents' holding a Centrelink Health Care Card, Centrelink Low Income Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card in their own name. This is because parents are responsible for paying school levies.

### How do I apply for STAS?

Detailed information about eligibility for STAS can be found in the [Student Financial Assistance Guidelines](#).

[Online applications](#) will open for the 2022 school year on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. If you would prefer a hard copy application, you can request a form from your school office or Service Tas shops.

### Who do I contact if I have a question in relation to STAS?

Questions about STAS can be forwarded to the Department of Education's Financial Services Unit at [stas@education.tas.gov.au](mailto:stas@education.tas.gov.au) or by calling 1800 827 055.

## Levies and charges in Tasmanian Government schools

### Why do schools have different levy amounts?

Under the *Education Act 2016*, principals are to develop their own school policy for levies and charges. Levies are set in consultation with the school community, through the School Association Committee. Because of this, levy amounts can vary between schools. Levies must be set at the minimum amount possible.

### What is the difference between a levy and a charge?

Levies and charges are payments made by parents to their child's school. Levies incorporate required costs, and charges are for optional costs. Schools work hard to minimise the costs of levies in line with community expectations.

Levies include costs for items and services that are required to complete the normal educational instruction at the school. Levies include the cost of:

- Any items which are essential to completing the student's core curriculum (e.g. essential stationery, textbooks, cooking ingredients, gardening supplies).
- Any services like excursions, performances and activities that are part of the curriculum (e.g. out-of-school excursions taken as part of a subject, in-school performances, guest speakers, class, year-level, and subject-specific camps).

Levies are not payable by families of students eligible for STAS.

Charges are payments made to the school for items or services that are optional. Charges may apply for:

- Optional activities (e.g. school band program)
- Optional items (e.g. yearbook, school photos)
- More expensive items/materials than the standard materials provided (e.g. hardwood instead of pine in woodwork)

### Are textbooks and equipment for years 11 and 12 included in the levy?

Textbooks, graphics calculators, and wearable items are not required to be included in the levy for students in Years 11 and 12, but work is underway to reduce costs to families for future years.

### What about interstate and international school trips?

These are not included in the school levy, even if these are part of a student's curriculum (e.g. language trips). These costs are charged for separately and are not waived for families supported by STAS.

## How can I provide feedback on the levies and charges at my school?

As a parent of a child at a Tasmanian Government school, you are a member of your School Association. If you would like to provide feedback on levies and charges, you can either do so through the School Association Committee or by contacting your school business manager.

## What should I do if I am having difficulty paying my child's levy?

If you have Centrelink Health Care Card, Centrelink Low Income Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card your family is eligible for STAS, and you do not need to pay levies. More information can be found in the [Student Financial Assistance Guidelines](#).

You can pay school levies through a payment plan, which can extend throughout the school year. Please contact your child's school if you would prefer to pay levies on a payment plan.

If your family is experiencing financial difficulty or hardship, you can contact your child's school to find out what support options are available. If you have any further questions you can contact the Financial Services unit at [stas@education.tas.gov.au](mailto:stas@education.tas.gov.au) or on 1800 827 055.

## Will my child be prevented for participating in any learning activities that are part of the curriculum if their levies have not been paid?

Students will not be prevented from participating in learning activities that are part of the curriculum if their levies have not been paid.

## What happens if I do not/cannot pay my child's levies and charges, and don't qualify for STAS?

If your family has not paid their levies by the due date and has not organised to pay by instalments, the school will be in contact to remind you that payment is due and will check to see if your family requires support. If your levies remain unpaid after the school has sent two follow-up letters, the matter will be forwarded to Finance and Budget Services within the Department of Education to be followed up.

## How do I pay levies and charges?

Levies can be paid:

- At the school (by EFTPOS, cash or cheque)
- At Service Tasmania (by EFTPOS, cash or cheque)
- Through BPAY (using the Biller Code and Reference on your invoice)
- By mail, forward your cheque, money order or credit card details to the school, with the payment slip from your invoice attached (payable to the Department of Education).

Payment plans can also be set up through your school, including payment plans extending throughout the school year.



Who can I speak to if I have questions or feedback on levies and charges at my school?

You can contact either your school or your School Association Committee if you would like to talk about levies at your school. Alternatively, you can contact the Department of Education's Financial Services Unit at [stas@education.tas.gov.au](mailto:stas@education.tas.gov.au) or by calling 1 800 827 055.

