



# BLACKALL RANGE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL FINANCIAL HARDSHIP POLICY

<b>Purpose:</b>	The purpose of this policy is to recognise that every family has a unique financial circumstance and situations can change in both short and long term. This policy recognises that those changes may lead to financial hardship and to establish a formal policy to direct processes	
<b>Scope:</b>	Parent/Caregiver(s) and families of students currently enrolled at Blackall Range Independent School	
<b>Status:</b>	Approved	<b>Supersedes:</b> None
<b>Authorised by:</b>	Blackall Range Independent School Executive	<b>Date of Authorisation:</b> 9 Apr 2020
<b>References:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enkindle Village School Financial Hardship Policy</li> <li>• Independent Schools Queensland</li> <li>• Bursars Forum</li> </ul>	
<b>Review Date:</b>	Annually by BRIS Executive	<b>Next Review Date:</b> 8 Apr 2021
<b>Policy Owner:</b>	BRIS Leadership and Executive	

## 1.0 Policy Statement

Blackall Range Independent School is committed to:

- Recognising that the families of the students who attend our school may go through periods of disruption to their income which places the family(s) into financial hardship
- That financial hardship places increased stress on families and students and this stress may impact on the wellbeing of BRIS families and students
- BRIS is committed to supporting the emotional well-being of its students and families and recognises that financial hardship might impact on student learning
- BRIS is an inclusive school that values its students and is committed to ensuring equal access for all the school's students
- Maintaining confidentiality of any/all communications and arrangements decided upon between Blackall Range Independent School and the families
- Provide details of a contact person at the school who the families can approach to apply for financial relief

## 2.0 Reducing Hardship

Blackall Range Independent School will reduce financial hardship experienced by families by

- Allowing families the option of applying for financial hardship relief
- Providing a scale of relief that supports families without placing undue financial burden on Blackall Range Independent School
- Allowing flexible arrangements for payment of fees

## 3.0 Definitions

**Financial hardship is defined as:**

*Families who have experienced a sudden loss of income, family trauma, loss of employment, either short or long term, disability, either permanent or temporary, that will impact on the continuity of their children's education at Blackall Range Independent School.*

## 4.0 Implementation

### 4.1 The School will:

4.1.1 Provide a "hardship allocation" within its annual operating budget to support the application of its Hardship Policy. More particularly, the hardship allocation will represent a budgeted amount the BRIS Executive is prepared to use to financially assist families in financial need. Hardship relief will be considered for families experiencing chronic long-term financial hardship or short-term crises on a case-by-case basis. Financial relief under the policy will not entail cash payments to parent/caregiver(s) but will involve relief from payment of certain levies and fees.

4.1.2 Notify parent/caregiver(s) of the existence of the Hardship Policy on the school website as well as notification in the BRIS Newsletter at least once annually.

4.1.3 Include in its annual operating budget an allocation to meet the cost of hardship cases. The amount budgeted will represent up to 5% of the annual debt allocation in line with accounting and auditing guidelines.

4.1.4 Annually increase the budgeted amount (in dollar terms) by the Government's CPI as is currently BRIS' policy with respect to the annual increase in BRIS' Tuition Fees

4.1.5 Use the hardship allocation to assist parent/caregiver(s) facing permanent or temporary financial hardship in the financing of items such as, but not exclusively: Fees, essential education items, School Camps, incursions and excursions and other ad hoc applications.

4.1.6 Ensure families facing hardship are afforded the option of paying school accounts via instalments or an agreed payment plan. Current options to use the school's spreadsheet payment plan continues each year and families will be offered a personalised plan.

4.1.7 Offer to reduce the quantum or alter the timelines of request parent payments. These can include but not be limited to: Waiving fees; reducing fees; deferring payment or extending payment deadlines, providing flexible payment plans - beyond that available under BRIS' standard policy.

#### **4.2 The Principal will:**

4.2.1 Have the responsibility for determining and administering the hardship allocation. Moreover, it will be the responsibility of the Principal to receive requests for financial relief and or identify circumstances in which she/he believes a legitimate case or cases of financial hardship exist. In circumstances where the latter applies, the Principal can grant relief in the absence of a parent-initiated application.

4.2.2 Ensure the school community and potential recipients of financial relief are made aware of the Hardship Policy and its applicability.

4.2.3 Have the ability to determine whether assistance is provided and the level of assistance provided. More particularly, the principal may elect for the school to absorb all or some of the fees or costs of camps, incursions and excursions, etc with review of the level of financial relief afforded to a family reviewed at least annually or more frequently at the discretion of the Principal. In determining eligibility the Principal will take into consideration, amongst other factors, whether the parent (s):

4.2.3.1 is a holder of a Government Health Care Card

4.2.3.2 has contacted Centrelink to discuss financial assistance

4.2.4 Consult with BRIS Executive Chair on individual circumstances in which the hardship budget is to be applied, including details of the circumstances under which financial relief is being sought and level of relief to be applied. In circumstances where the Principal and BRIS Executive Chair disagree on what relief is to be provided, the BRIS Executive Treasurer will be called upon to make the decision.

4.2.4.1 At each BRIS Executive meeting provide an update on the extent to which the hardship allocation has been applied, and advise the BRIS Executive Chair of individual circumstances in which the hardship budget has been applied, including details of the circumstances under which relief is being sought or applied. The updates to the BRIS Executive are to be in summary form and not include the names of families receiving hardship relief. More particularly, to protect the privacy of families their identity will only be made available to the BRIS Principal, Business Manager/Accounts staff and BRIS Executive Chair.

4.2.5 Have the ability to decline or suspend financial relief to a family if in their view a request from the family is unsubstantiated or no longer applies.

4.2.6 Seek BRIS Executive approval for use of additional funds beyond that budgeted for in a particular year.

4.2.7 Have the ability to also provide additional non-financial school resources, such as stationery etc when she or he deems it appropriate to support the physical and emotional wellbeing of the child(ren).

4.2.7 Not be permitted to grant direct cash payments to families or to use the hardship allocation to meet offsite school obligations.

4.2.8 Each case will be reviewed every term with the Executive. *Application form details criteria that will be used at review.*

### **4.3 The Parent/ Caregiver(s) Will:**

4.3.1 Have the opportunity to apply for hardship relief based on financial considerations. Note, hardship relief provided to beneficiaries will in most cases only be undertaken after government financial assistance has been investigated/applied for. It is envisaged that in most cases the financial relief provided by BRIS will supplement assistance already provided under various Centrelink programs.

4.3.2 Apply directly to the BRIS Principal using the Financial Hardship Application Form which can be obtained from the Accounts office staff.

4.3.3 Need to be prepared to demonstrate the basis under which the hardship relief should be granted to them. Circumstances under which it is envisaged that hardship relief may be appropriate include: unemployment of the main income earner; illness of the family's main income earner preventing them from working; death/incapacitation of parent/caregiver(s); out of home care arrangements or temporary foster parent/caregiver; family breakdown or severe family disruption (e.g. divorce, separation, substance dependence); family violence; natural disaster; refugee status; or a family simply "doing it tough".

4.3.4 Not be required to meet the full or part cost of the stationery packs/bookpacks, camps and or incursion/excursions if they are successful in their application or if the Principal considers it appropriate that financial relief be provided in the absence of a parent-initiated application.

4.3.5. The family/applicant to agree that they will notify the school if there is an increase in income or circumstances within the hardship relief period.

## **Compliance and Monitoring**

Blackall Range Independent School Financial Hardship Policy Flowchart

## **Appendices**

Flowchart 2020