

DEBT AND SCHOOL MEAL PAYMENT POLICY

Date of Issue	January 2023
Originator	J Delaney
Responsible Sub Committee	Finance & Resources
Linked Policies	n/a
Review Date	2023
Target Audience	All stakeholders in the Trust
Dissemination Via	Email, Sharepoint

Contents

1. Debt Policy	1
2. School Dinner Policy	1
Appendix 1 – Initial letter to parents School Meals (reminder letter).....	3
Appendix 2 – First debt letter School Meals (Headteacher)	4
Appendix 3 – Second debt letter School Meals (Trust)	5
Appendix 4 – Initial letter to parents non-school meals (reminder letter)	6
Appendix 5 – First debt letter non-school meals	7
Appendix 6 – Second debt letter non-school meals (Trust).....	8

1. Debt Policy

All invoices should be paid by the due date.

Finance teams should review the level of debt on a monthly basis and chase any outstanding amounts due.

Where payment is not received on a timely basis from phone call; chasing then the letters in the appendices should be used to escalate the chasing of the debt to ensure payment.

The Standing Financial Instructions policy sets out the rules for any debt write off which must be approved by the CFO. This is only used in exceptional circumstances after all other avenues for payment have been used.

2. School Dinner Policy

2.1 Background

This policy has been written to help our schools adopt a consistent approach to debt incurred by parents whose children take school dinners. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

School meals service is no different than any other business and the meals must be paid for by someone. Parents should be able to relate to the situation that they cannot take their child to a restaurant and expect them to be given food without paying. Yet a minority of parents in the school expect us to provide food for their children without paying for it.

2.2 Policy

All school meals must be paid for in advance – either by the parents/carers or via the **Free School Meals (FSM)** system (for parents who cannot afford school meals), there should be no excuses.

Unpaid debts due to the school / Trust will be chased. The debt will remain payable after the student has left the school. We will consider our relationships with families in the way we do this but there is a zero tolerance to unpaid debts.

Secondary pupils will be refused a meal if they have not paid. There may occasionally be the decision about whether a child is refused a meal in school if they have not paid. This decision will be made by either the Headteacher or Business manager of the school – i.e for discretion to allow up to £4 for exceptional cases.

2.3 Communication to parents

Parents will be made aware of this policy via methods such as school's newsletter, school brochure and website at least annually. All parents will be provided with a copy of the policy when their child joins the school.

No child should be sent to school with no money in their account and expect to be given a meal.

The letter to parents is attached as Appendix I with the key message that no child should be sent to school without money in their account and expect to be given a meal (except for those with Free School Meals (FSM)).

2.4 Debt policy implementation

Level	Indicator	Action
1	A child's account goes into debt – first instance Check 1: is this a FSM child, are dates correct? Check 2: are there uncredited payments? Check 3: does parent normally pay on time, is this just a one off?	Send reminder letter – Appendix I
2	A child in debt – more than one instance Check 1: is this a FSM child (or moving in and out of FSM), are dates correct? Check 2: are there uncredited payments? Check 3: does parent normally pay on time, is this just a one off?	Phone the parent to ask them to pay or make alternate arrangements for food for the student before lunchtime. If funds not received (primary school = provide a meal, secondary school = up to £4 meal provided at school discretion.
3	The parent does not comply with level 1 or 2 Check 1: is this a FSM child, are dates correct? Check 2: are there uncredited payments? Check 3 : has this parent made contact?	Head teacher issue debt letter – Appendix 2
4	No payment or action following debt letter	Trust to issue debt letter and advise that if unpaid legal action may follow. Appendix 3

Appendix I – Initial letter to parents School Meals (reminder letter)

Dear Parents / Carers

School Meals Policy

Please ensure that your child has money in their account or are able to pay for a school meal or brings a pack lunch to school to ensure they have a healthy meal during the day.

We have a NO DEBT policy relating to the school meals and they must be paid for in advance.

If you believe that you may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals please contact the office for more details. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. We will help you all we can with your application

If debts are incurred, or payments are made late this wastes school resources which means less time and money spent on the children's education. I am sure everybody will agree that this is unacceptable and we hope that all parents give this policy their full support. As we all know nobody expects their child to be given food from shops or restaurants without paying; the same applies at school.

School lunches must be paid for in advance using any of the methods of payment outlined below:

- Through our online system
- Send cash or cheque in a marked envelope.

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of one meal. However this debt must be paid next day and future meals must be paid in advanced before any meal is provided.

If the debt is not cleared, parents must provide a packed lunch until it is paid. In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the office will phone the parent to ask them to come to school with the money or provide sandwiches before lunch time.

If payment of the debt is not received by the next day, the Headteacher will write formally to the parent to recover the debt and instigate our debt recovery policy which may ultimately lead to legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt. Social services may also be informed due to the lack of responsibility of care by not providing food for their children at lunchtime.

We hope that by implementing this debt policy we are able to help parents manage school dinner money better and at the same time ensure that all the money that is for children's learning is available.

If you have any concerns please don't hesitate in contacting me.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

Appendix 2 – First debt letter School Meals (Headteacher)

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name) (Address
Line 1)
(Address Line 2)
(Address Line 3) (Post
Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)

Our records show that your outstanding dinner money debt at xx/xx/xx is **£xx**.

Please make arrangements for the outstanding dinner money debt to be paid immediately. Once you have cleared the current debt I should be grateful if you could ensure that you keep your account in credit to ensure your child receives a school meal. The current cost of a school meal is £x per day or £x per week.

Since non-payment for school meals affects the quality of service we offer to the children, we need to ensure that all payments are up-to-date and I am afraid that if the debt is not cleared by the end of this week it will not be possible to provide your child with a school meal. You will need to make your own arrangements for your child's lunch.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information. **Remember that Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify, your child will then receive a School meal each day.** Additional information and an application form can be found on the School website in the school office if you do not have an internet connection. The school staff will happily support you in completing an application for Free School Meals.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or wish to discuss the matter further please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

Appendix 3 – Second debt letter School Meals (Trust)

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name) (Address
Line 1)
(Address Line 2)
(Address Line 3) (Post
Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)

I am writing regarding the current level of outstanding school meal debt that is showing on your account. Despite previous correspondences and messages the debt for your child is still outstanding and as seriously overdue.

The amount due is £x .

Please make arrangements to clear this debt immediately and take steps to ensure your account is kept in credit in the future. If you wish to discuss a payment plan with us please contact the school office.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information. **Remember that Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify, your child will then receive a School meal each day.** Additional information and an application form can be found on the School website in the school office if you do not have an internet connection. The school staff will happily support you in completing an application for Free School Meals.

If the debt is not cleared within a week or we have not heard from you to arrange payment the School reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the debt and to inform the Social Services that your child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time. Where legal action is commenced you will be liable for our legal costs and interest.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

Appendix 4 – Initial letter to parents non-school meals (reminder letter)

Dear xxx / Parents / Carers

Debt Policy

We have a NO DEBT policy and amounts must be paid by the due date or paid for in advance.

[If you believe that you may qualify for any entitlement to a reduction then please contact the office for more details. *This may be applicable for parents*]. We will assess whether there is any support available for you

If debts are incurred, or payments are made late this wastes school resources which means less time and money spent on the children's education . I am sure everybody will agree that this is unacceptable and we hope that you give this policy your full support.

If payment of the debt is not received in the next week, the Headteacher will write formally to recover the debt and instigate our debt recovery policy which may ultimately lead to legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt.

We hope that by implementing this debt policy we ensure that all the money that is for children's learning is available.

If you have any concerns please don't hesitate in contacting me.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

Appendix 5 – First debt letter non-school meals (Headteacher)

Name xxx
(Address Line 2)
(Address Line 3) (Post
Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

Debt Policy

Our records show that your outstanding debt due to the School / Trust at xxxx (date) is **£xx**.
Please make arrangements for the outstanding debt to be paid immediately.

We have a NO DEBT policy and amounts must be paid by the due date or paid for in advance. If debts are incurred, or payments are made late this wastes school resources which means less time and money spent on the children's education . I am sure everybody will agree that this is unacceptable and we hope that you give this policy your full support.

If payment of the debt is not received in the next week, we may instigate further action in our debt recovery policy which may ultimately lead to legal proceedings to recover the debt.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or wish to discuss the matter further please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

If you have any concerns please don't hesitate in contacting me.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

Appendix 6 – Second debt letter non-school meals (Trust)

Name xxx
(Address Line 2)
(Address Line 3) (Post
Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

Debt Policy

I am writing regarding the current level of debt that is showing on your account. Despite previous correspondences and messages, the debt is still outstanding and seriously overdue.

The amount due is £x.

Please make arrangements to cover this debt immediately.

If the debt is not cleared within a week or we have not heard from you to arrange payment the school and Trust reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the debt. Where legal action is commenced you will be liable for our legal costs and interest.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely

Chief Operations and Finance Officer