



School Meal Debt Policy

Reviewed by Resources Committee: 26th February 2020

Next Review: February 2021

This policy has been written to help schools adopt a consistent approach to debt. It provides clarity and consistency to managing debt and will help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

The system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach. Although this will be tough to implement it will become easy to maintain once parents realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for FSM entitlement, all other meals must be paid for.

Since schools are invoiced for meals taken, it is essential that sufficient funds are credited for these meals into the central account through the cash and cheque deposit process. If there are insufficient funds then the schools are required to cover the shortfall from their budget, if a shortfall occurs the school is required to pay the difference. This results in money which should be spent on the children's education being used to pay for debts incurred by parents.

If parents believe their children qualify for Free School Meals they can contact the School reception for more details.

Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that parents who qualify are encouraged to apply; parents receive help with their applications either via reception or from the family worker.

Payment for meals

Parent/s must pay in advance for the school meals using the method of payment outlined below:

- Send cash or cheque in a marked envelope (Childs name and class) or
- Make an online payment through ParentMail on the pupils account.

Children will not be provided with a school meal unless it is paid for, except those that are entitled to free school meals.

If the debt is accrued and not cleared, parents will be required to provide a packed lunch.

In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the Head of school will phone the parent to ask them to come to school with the money immediately. Otherwise they must provide sandwiches before lunch time or arrange to take their child home for lunch.

If payment of the debt is not received on the next working day, the Head of school/Executive Head of school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt. Social services may also be informed that the

parents are not carrying out their parental responsibilities by not providing a meal for their children at lunchtime.

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

Debt policy implementation

Key Information

1. All parents will be provided with a copy of the school meal policy when their child joins the school.
2. All school lunches must be paid for in advance.
3. No child should be sent to school without money in their account and expect to be given a meal.
4. Parents, who don't want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch.

Protocol to be followed:-

Level 1

Indicator: A child's account goes into debt:

Check 1 - Is the child entitled to a FSM, are dates correct?

Check 2 - Is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 3 - Does this parent normally pay on time; is this just a one off?

Criteria checked then move to step 1.

Step 1: Parent fails to pay for a child's school meal for a period of two weeks.

A reminder letter on school headed notepaper will be sent to the parents at the end of the first week for which income has not been received this is generated via SIMS. Similar letters will be sent on a weekly basis for three weeks. The third letter should state that provision of school meals may be withdrawn if no payment is forthcoming.

Level 2

Indicator: The child comes to school again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch

Check 1- Is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 2- Has this parent made contact?

Criteria checked then move to step 2.

Step 2: Parent fails to pay for child's school meal and this continues for a 4 week period

- a) School will continue to ask parent for payment during the third week.
- b) After 3 weeks, the school will send a letter on school headed paper (to be sent as soon as possible during the fourth week without payment) to the parent requesting that payment be made forthwith and within 7 days. **The letter must also state that if payment is not made then meals will not be provided to their child/children from the start of the following week and that the parent must make alternative lunchtime arrangements e.g. provision of a packed lunch.**

Level 3

Indicator: The parent does not comply with any of these options,

Check 1- Is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 2- Has this parent made contact?

Criteria checked then move to step 3.

Step 3: Parent continues not to pay for school meals – Meals have now been provided for four weeks without payment.

- a) Under these circumstances, meals would have continued to have been provided for the 4 week period and the debt will be mounting per child – with a family the debt could be significantly more.
- b) The deadline stated in the second letter has now expired and if the parent has not paid, alternative arrangements should now be in place for the child's lunch. If alternative arrangements are not in place on the first day of the week the school need to remind the parents to supply a packed lunch.

Level 4

Indicator: The parent consistently does not comply with any of these options,

Check 1- Is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 2- Has this parent made contact?

Step 4: Parent continues not to pay for child's school meal beyond the 4 week period and after the second letter has been sent

- a) If, after exhaustive efforts, the school is not able to recover the debt that mounted up prior to meals being stopped, the school would request an external invoice to be raised.
- b) Bring in outside agencies, LA to advise, small claims court and social services