



Dinner Money Debt Policy

This policy has been written to help our School 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.

The Free School Meals system is there for parents of children of all ages to claim if they are in receipt of certain benefits; information is available from the school office or via www.hertfordshire.gov.uk.

Also, all pupils in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are now entitled to receive Universal Infant Free School Meals.

Therefore, this policy only relates to pupils in Key Stage 2 (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) whose parents pay for school meals.

The School wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals which they then find difficult to clear.

The Governors at The Leys Primary & Nursery School feel that a system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach. We understand that it may seem a very hard stance as there has been a country-wide culture of debt tolerance. However, it will become easy to maintain once parents realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for FSM or UIFSM entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for.

It is very time consuming for the School's office staff to continually chase parents for payment - by letter, phone call or in person. It is also highly embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative effect on our relationships with families.

There will occasionally be the decision to be made by the School about whether a child should be refused a meal in school if no payment has been made. However, the School is no different than any other café / restaurant and meals taken must be paid for.

The School will make parents aware of this policy in the following ways:

- A letter to parents
- Reminders in the School's newsletter
- The School website.

This will ensure that all parents get the same message in a consistent way. All parents will be reminded about the policy when their child joins KS2.

The letter to parents is attached as Appendix 1.



Key Information

1. All school lunches must be paid for in advance
2. Parent/carers child must not send a child to School with no money in their account and expect their child to be given a meal
3. Where a debt has accrued amounting to £10, parents will be asked to provide packed lunches from home until the debt has been cleared
4. Parents who do not want their child to have a school meal should provide a healthy packed lunch

Debt Recovery policy implementation

Weekly checks

£2 - £10 debt

- A reminder statement / text will be issued to all parents reminding them to top up their account

Letter 1- £10 plus debt

- A reminder letter will be issued asking parents to top up their dinner money account before any further meals are ordered and to send their child to school with a packed lunch until the debt is cleared (appendix 2)

Letter 2 - If debt is still o/s 14 days after letter 1 issued

- A letter will be issued to parents asking that debt be cleared within 7 days or the debt will be referred to HCC for recovery under their debt recovery procedures. Parents will again be asked not order any meals until their account is in credit and to send their child to school with a packed lunch (Appendix 3)



Appendix 1

Dear Parents / Carers

School Meals Debt Recovery Policy – Key Stage 2 children

Due to an increase in the number of school meals that are regularly not being paid for and to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals, we have, like all other schools, decided to adopt a **No Debt** policy relating to school meals.

We hope that all parents will give this policy their full support. As we all know, nobody takes their child to cafes/restaurants and expect them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school. School meals must be paid for in advance using our online payment system at www.schoolgateway.com (please contact us if there is a genuine reason e.g. no access to a computer, that you are unable to pay in this way and we will try to help with an alternative).

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the School may grant a debt allowance of 3 meals. However, this debt must be cleared and the account topped up as soon as possible.

If the debt is not cleared, parents must provide a packed lunch. 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 clear the outstanding balance or provide a packed lunch before lunchtime.

If the debt rises and payment is not received within 1 week of the final reminder letter, as a school we will be forced to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt. This would be carried out by referring the debt to HCC for collection under their debt recovery measures. The School's Education Welfare Officer and Social Services may also be informed that these parents are not carrying out their responsibility of care by not providing food for their children at lunchtime.

By implementing this debt policy we are aiming to help parents manage school dinner money better and to ensure that money given to the school for educational purposes is spent in the correct way.

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.

If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely

Ms L Humphries
Headteacher



Appendix 2

Dear,

Re: School Meal Payments for NAME, CLASS

NAME has been taking school meals this year, however the school has not received any dinner money recently. The outstanding balance on DATE was AMOUNT.

As you will be aware, all school meals must be paid for in advance using our online payment system (unless you have made alternative arrangements with us) and we must therefore ask you to clear the outstanding balance within the next 14 days and top up your child's account before any further meals are taken.

If your child orders a further meal we will unfortunately have no choice but to telephone to ask you to provide a packed lunch. We do not like doing this as it causes embarrassment to us and we would therefore ask that you clear the account so that this can be avoided. **For more information please see our Dinner Money Debt policy, which can be found on our website, or alternatively ask the office for a copy.**

If you believe you may qualify for 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.

We look forward to receiving your payment, however if you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Ms L Humphries
Headteacher



Appendix 3

Dear ,

Re: School Meal Payments for NAME, CLASS

NAME has been taking school meals this year; however the school has not received any dinner money recently and we have not received a response to our previous letter dated. The outstanding balance on DATE was AMOUNT.

As stated in The Leys Primary & Nursery School Meals Debt Recovery Policy, all school meals must be paid for in advance using our online payment system (unless you have made alternative arrangements with us) and we must therefore ask you to clear the outstanding balance within the next 7 days and top up your child's account before any further meals are taken.

If your child orders a further meal we will unfortunately have no choice but to telephone to ask you to provide a packed lunch. We do not like doing this as it causes embarrassment to us both and we would therefore ask that you clear the account so that this can be avoided. **For more information please see our Dinner Money Debt policy, which can be found on our website, or alternatively ask the office for a copy.**

If payment is not received within 7 days we will unfortunately have to refer the debt to Hertfordshire Catering Ltd for recovery. We must implement our policy as we have to ensure that the money given to the school for educational purposes is spent in the correct way and not used to cover school dinner debts.

If you believe you may qualify for 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.

We look forward to receiving your payment, however if you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Ms L Humphries
Headteacher
The Leys Primary School



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