

Woodfield Primary School



(35) School Meals Debt Policy

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School Meals Debt Policy

- 1 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.
- 2 There will occasionally be the decision to be made about whether a child should be refused a meal in school if payment has not been made. However, the school meals service is no different than any other business and the meals must be paid for by someone.
- 3 Parents may relate to the situation that, just as they cannot take their child to a restaurant for a meal without paying, neither should they expect the school to provide food for their child if it has not been paid for. The Free School Meals system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals - there should be no excuses.
- 4 It is very time consuming for the office staff to continually chase parents for money - 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.
- 5 The Governors at Woodfield Primary 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 culture of debt tolerance and that this will be tough to implement. However, it will become easy to maintain once parents realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for FSM entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for. Our ParentPay dinner money system highlights debt immediately, so keeping track will be easy.
- 6 The school will make parents aware of this policy in the following ways:
 - A letter/email to parents
 - Reminders in the school's newsletter
 - The school website
- 7 This will ensure that all parents get the same message in a consistent way. This will be done at least once each year, more often when it is first introduced. All parents will be provided with a copy of the policy when their child joins the school as part of the Home School Agreement.
- 8 Key Information
 - All school lunches must be paid for in advance.
 - No child should be sent to school with no money in their account and expect to be given a meal.
 - Parents who don't want their child to have a school lunch should provide a healthy packed lunch.

Debt Policy Implementation

Level 1 Indicator: A child's account goes into debt

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, 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?
- Action 1: Send a 'Gentle debt reminder' email/letter – see APPENDIX A for example

Level 2 Indicator: A child comes to school again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
- Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3 has this parent made contact?
- Action 2: Personal contact Someone will phone the parent to ask them to either bring the money into school or bring sandwiches in before lunchtime.

Level 3 Indicator: The parent does not comply with any of these options.

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
- Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3 has this parent made contact?
- Action 3: Send strong debt reminder email/ letter - see APPENDIX B for example The Acting Head Teacher will send a final letter.

Level 4 Indicator: The parent consistently does not comply with any of these options

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
- Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3 has this parent made contact?
- Action 4: Bring in outside agencies e.g. Legal

APPENDIX A – Example letter ‘Gentle Debt Reminder’

Dear Parent / Carer

Insert name and class of child

This is a reminder that, according to our records, you have arrears on your child’s dinner money account.

Our records show that at **Insert date** your debt is **insert amount**.

In order for your child to continue to receive school dinners, it is important to keep your account in credit at all times.

Please arrange for the amount stated above to be paid within 7 days by **insert date**

In the meantime, you will need to provide your child with packed lunches until your account has been settled.

You can pay using ParentPay (www.parentpay.com), our secure online payment system, by selecting the 'School Meal Payment' service. Your login details are: **insert ParentPay details**

Alternatively, you can pay in cash at any store displaying the Paypoint sign, by using a PayPoint card or by presenting this barcoded letter. (PayPoint payments can take up to 36 hours to show on your ParentPay account). Please note that school meals should be paid for in advance (preferably at least weekly).

You can check your account balance at any time by logging into your ParentPay account.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office.

Yours sincerely

Jayne Miller

Assistant Head

Insert ParentPay barcode

APPENDIX B: Example 'Strong Debt Reminder'

Dear Parent / Carer

Insert name and class of child

This is a reminder that, according to our records, you have arrears on your child's dinner money account. Our records show that at **insert date** your debt is **insert amount**. Your debt has already been outstanding for more than 7 days. We would therefore ask you to make immediate payment. If you are unable to do so, please provide your child with packed lunches until your account has been settled. If this continues to be unpaid, the school office will contact you to discuss any queries and arrange a payment schedule.

You can pay using ParentPay (www.parentpay.com), our secure online payment system, by selecting the 'School Meal Payment' service. Your login details are: **insert Parent Pay details** Alternatively, you can pay in cash at any store displaying the Paypoint sign, by using a PayPoint card or by presenting this barcoded letter. (PayPoint payments can take up to 36 hours to show on your ParentPay account).

Please note that payment for school meals should be made in advance (£2.20 per day, or £11.00 for the week ahead), and that it is important to keep your account in credit at all times.

You can check your account balance at any time by logging into your ParentPay account. If you think your child may be entitled to receive Free School Meals, please contact the school office.

Yours sincerely

Kate Hope

Head Teacher

Insert ParentPay barcode