

All Saints CE (VC) First School

Policy on

School Meals Debt

Date: January 2015

Approved by:

Reviewed: January 2017

Reviewed: January 2019

Reviewed: November 2021

**To be reviewed: January 2023**

**Background**

This policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners is implemented. As the Local Authority is no longer accountable for the administration of dinner money debt the responsibility now falls on the school to pursue instances of non-payment. As a result the school budget will have to directly fund any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered, thereby directly affecting the amount of money that is available to provide education to all pupils.

**Provision of School Meals**

The schools meals service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for by someone. Free School Meals are available for parents who meet certain criteria including the receipt of state benefits. Universal Infant Free School Meals are available to all pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2. Anyone who may qualify for Free School Meals should contact the school office for further information. Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that all parents/carers who qualify take up their child’s entitlement so that they can receive a school meal each day.

Information on the entitlement to free school meals and an application form can be found on the Staffordshire County Council’s website:

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Education/Educational-awards-benefits/FreeSchoolMeals/Apply-online.aspx>

If a child’s entitlement to free school meals expires or the parents/carers personal circumstances change the parent/carer must provide a packed lunch or send payment in advance for a school dinner.

**Cost of School Meals**

School meals are available to children at a cost of £2.55 per day or at no cost to those in receipt of Free School Meals/Universal Infant Free school meal entitlement. School meals should be paid for in advance. Any revision to the school meal prices will be notified to parents/carers the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

**Payment for School Meals**

All school meals should be paid for in advance by parents adding a weekly/monthly credit to the online School Money service.

**Management of School Meal Debts**

To ensure that the School’s budget is not adversely affected by the cost of school meal debt, the Governors consider the fairest system to all families is to pursue a ‘Zero Tolerance’ approach. Although, this may seem harsh to some parents it is important that the school budget is spent for the benefit of all our pupils.

Any arrears must be settled by the 14th of the following month or before arrears exceed £24, whichever is the earliest. Weekly reminder texts will be sent when any account is in arrears.

If a child arrives at school without a packed lunch or credit on their account, or if a child’s entitlement to free school meals has ceased, the school will telephone the parent/carer in the first instance to establish if alternative arrangements have been made.

Where it is felt that this is a temporary situation the school may allow a meal to be provided. If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, an email detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting payment directly to the school within seven days.

Where a child continues to require meals, without credit on the account, the School will endeavour to establish if the child is entitled to free school meals, or if the parent/carer is experiencing hardship which affects their ability to pay. Under these circumstances the parent/carer should be invited to apply for free school meals or speak confidentially to the Head Teacher.

When the debt exceeds £24 for a *child or family* a formal letter will be sent to the parent/carer informing them that a packed lunch should be provided to prevent further arrears. *(Example letter 1).*

If the debt exceeds £50 for a family and/or action proves unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, the School will begin the process for Early Help and formally write to the parent/carer, explaining that the School is not obliged to provide a school meal where advance payment is not forthcoming or where authorisation for free school meals has not been received *(Example letter 2).*

**Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts**

At each meeting of the Governing Body/Finance Committee, the Head Teacher will provide Governors with details of any outstanding debt and the current position with regard to such debt. The aim of the School’s dinner money debt policy is to minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up and incurring costly referral to the School’s solicitors. The School does however, reserve the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal debts and inform the local authority that a child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

All Write-offs of outstanding debt must be approved by the Governing Body/Finance Committee following submission of details of the debt by the Head Teacher together with reasons for no further action being taken.

**Example – Letter 1**

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)

According to the School’s financial records you have dinner money arrears for your child (pupil name). As at xx/xx/xx your account is showing a debt of £xx.

In order that the school’s budget is not used to clear your debt 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. The current cost of a school meal is £2.55 per day.

Since the School has to fund all school meal debts from its budget it is essential that all payments are up to date so that the quality of the service provided to all pupils is maintained. Unfortunately, if the debt is not cleared by xx/xx/xx a school meal will no longer be provided to your child and you must 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 Staffordshire County Council’s website or in the school office if you do not have access to the Internet:

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Education/Educational-awards-benefits/FreeSchoolMeals/Apply-online.aspx>

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

**Example – Letter 2**

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 is still outstanding. The School’s records show that as at xx/xx/xx your account is £x in arrears. The current cost of a school meal is £2.55 per day.

I would ask that you please make arrangements to clear this debt immediately and take steps to ensure your account is kept in credit in the future.

Since the School has to fund all school meal debts from its budget it is essential that all payments are up to date so that the quality of the service provided to all pupils is maintained. Unfortunately, following previous reminders proving ineffective, a school meal will no longer be provided to your child with immediate effect and you must 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 Staffordshire County Council’s website or in the school office if you do not have access to the Internet:

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/Education/Educational-awards-benefits/FreeSchoolMeals/Apply-online.aspx>

The School reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the outstanding debt and to inform the local authority that your child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

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