



Northstead Community Primary School
Seek to Learn

School Meals Debt Policy

Document Status			
Date of Policy Creation from School template	April 2024	Date of Next Review	June 2026
Date of Policy Adopted by Headteacher 20/06/2025		Responsibility	Headteacher – Mr S Hopper
Method of Communication Policy file/School Server		Signed	
		Date	20-6-25

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

There have been many discussions around whether a child should be refused a meal in school if they have not paid. However, the school meals service is no different than any other business and the meals must be paid for by someone.

Parents can easily 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 expect free food in school. The Free School Meals system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals, there should be no excuses. Applying for Free School Meals is straight forward and parents apply online, assuming eligibility is authorised the child can take a free school meal the following school day. Please ask at the school office for the link to apply.

The system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach. It may seem a very hard stance in a school where there is a culture of debt tolerance. 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. Every other meal must be paid for. Our ParentPay system highlights debt immediately so keeping track will be easy.

Implementation:

Parents are made aware of this policy electronically via e-mail.

This policy is on the school website.

All parents will be provided with a copy of the policy when their child joins the school.

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.

The policy is attached as Appendix 1.

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: weekly 'Gentle debt reminder' letter will be sent. See Appendix 2

Level 2 Indicator: If debt is not cleared by following Monday

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 money, pay online or bring sandwiches to school 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 letter.

Appendix 3 The 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 who will initiate further action.

APPENDIX 1 Initial Letter

Dear Parent/Carer

Following an increase in the amount of debt being owed to school following non-payment of school dinners, Governors of the School have decided to adopt a clear NO DEBT policy relating to the school meal service.

If debts are incurred, then the school budget has to pay for them. This means that money which should be spent on the children's education is used to pay for debts incurred by parents. Every parent will agree that this is unacceptable and we request that all parents give this policy their full support. No parent would take their child to another eatery and expect them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school. When debts are run up this also causes additional workload for our office staff and can be embarrassing for them and the parents.

If you believe that your children may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals please contact the school office on 01723362249. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. Help is available with your application from the school office.

Parent/s must pay in advance for the school lunch using any of the methods of payment outlined below:

- Online using ParentPay THIS IS OUR PREFERRED METHOD
- Send cash or cheque in a marked envelope

If a parent/carers genuinely forgets to pay for a meal in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance during the first week of the debt. However this debt must be paid by the weekend of the same week and future meals must be paid in advance before any meal is provided.

If the debt is not cleared

Parents must provide a packed lunch for their child(ren).

It is not the responsibility of the school to provide a meal unless it has been paid for or your child is entitled to free school meals. It is the responsibility of the school to provide the service for this.

In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided

The school office will phone you to ask you to come to school with the money / ask you to pay online immediately or provide sandwiches before lunch time for your child.

If payment of the debt is not received by the next day

The Headteacher reserves the right to inform the Chair of Governors to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt.

It is not the responsibility of the school to provide a meal. It is the responsibility of parents/carers to provide a meal or the means to pay for a meal.

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 money that is for children's learning is available. This will also free up time with the office and the leadership of the school on more important matters than chasing debt from families.

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

Yours sincerely, Head Teacher
APPENDIX 2 – Letter/Notice 2

Contact name
Contact address

Dear xxxxxxxxxxxx

Pupil: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx Class:xxxxxxx

I am writing to remind you that according to our records, you have arrears on your child's dinner money account. In order for your child to continue to receive school lunches it is important to keep your account in credit. Please note that school dinners are now £3.50 per day, or £17.50 per week.

Our records show that for your child xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx Class: xxxxxx at xxxxxxxx your debt is £xxxxxxx

Your username and password are:

User Name xxxxxxxxxx Password xxxxxxxxxx

You can check your account balance anytime by logging into your ParentPay account.

Non-payment for school meals affects the quality of service we are able to offer to the children therefore we need to ensure that all accounts are up-to-date.

Please note that anyone not clearing the debt in full by the following Monday, will be telephoned to bring in a packed lunch for your child, or asked to take your child home for lunch. Once the debt is cleared please ensure the account remains in credit

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or if you have difficulty making payment please contact the school office to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Our School
Contact name
Contact address
Date

Dear xxxxxxxxxxxx

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child xxxxxxxxxxxx Class: xx despite a previous written reminder and a telephone call

As at xx/xx/xxxx your account is showing a debt of £-xx.xx

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately. You have 2 ways to pay: 1. In the secure online payment system ParentPay, using the login already provided, go to www.parentpay.com NB THIS IS OUR PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD Your username and password are: Username: xxxxxx Password: yyyyyyy 2. Send in money to school in a marked envelope.

No matter how you pay you can check the account balance anytime by logging into your ParentPay account at www.parentpay.com. You can see what meals have been taken and when. The cost of a school meal is £3.50 per day - £17.50 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.

The school reserves the right to begin legal proceeding to recover the debt. If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher