



Weston Mill Community Primary School

SCHOOL MEALS DEBT RECOVERY POLICY 2015/16

Approved and signed by Governors:

Dated:

October 2015

Weston Mill Primary School
School Meals Debt Recovery Policy 2015/16

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: if you believe you are entitled to this then information and an application form is available from the school office or on the [Plymouth City Council's website](#).

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 Nursery, 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 Weston Mill Community 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 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. Our Parentpay online / dinner money system highlights debt immediately so keeping track is easy.

It is very time consuming for the School's Office Staff to continually chase parents for payment – by text, letter, and phone call or in person. It can also be embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative affect on our relationships with families.

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

- A letter to parents (Appendix 1)
- Reminders in the School's newsletter;
- The School website.

This will ensure that all parents get the same message in a consistent way. This will be done at least once a year.

All parents will be reminded about the policy when their child joins KS2.

The letter to parents is attached as Appendix 2.

Key Information

1. All school lunches must be paid for in advance.
2. No child should be sent to School with no money in their account and expect to be given a meal.
3. Where a debt has accrued amounting to 5 meals, 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 check

£2 - £10 debt

- Debt report checked
- A reminder text will be issued to all parents asking them pay the debt and credit their account.

£10 debt to £25

- A reminder letter will be issued to all parents asking them to top up account before any further meals are ordered and to send their child to school with a packed lunch (Appendix 3)

£26 plus

- A letter will be issued to parents asking that debt be cleared within 7 days or that the debt will be referred to Plymouth City Council for recovery under their debt recovery procedures. Parents will again be asked not to order any meals until their account is in credit and to send their child to school with a packed lunch (Appendix 4)

Date:

Dear Parent / Carer

Re: Payment for School Meals

I wish to inform you of our School Meals Debt Recovery Policy. This policy relates to pupils in Nursery, Key Stage 2 (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) whose parents pay for school meals – a copy is on our website.

For some time we have used the Parentpay system to record your child's school meal payments online. In the main this works well as our parents are supportive of the payment system. You can access the Parentpay website to make payments at any time 24/7. We request that at least one week's dinner money is paid in advance and please keep your account topped up at all times to avoid you incurring a school meal debt. School meals must be paid for in advance using the following method of payment: Online at www.parentpay.com – your online payments will show up almost immediately on our system.

We appreciate the support from the majority of parents but at times we experience difficulties with parents who regularly incur a school meals debt because they have not topped up their online account. Therefore, Weston Mill Community Primary School has adopted a **NO DEBT** policy relating to school meals.

The school must avoid a situation where parents accrue a debt for school meals which they then find difficult to clear. By implementing this Debt Policy we are aiming to help parents manage school dinner money better. We as a school will liaise with parents and continue to support them in clearing any debt. Should a case arise where payment of the debt is still not received, the School's Governors have requested that I inform the Chair of Governors who may decide to begin legal proceedings through Plymouth City Council against the parent to recover the debt. Whilst we hope that we will not have to process such a claim, we have to adopt a policy to ensure that school meal money debts are collected promptly. The Local Authority's Education Welfare Officer and Social Services may also be informed that a parent is not carrying out their responsibility of care by failing to pay or provide food for their child at lunchtime.

Entitlement to Free School Meals:

If you believe that you may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals, please contact the office for further 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. Also, all pupils in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are now entitled to receive Universal Infant Free School Meals paid for by the Government. Therefore, this policy relates to pupils in Nursery, Key Stage 2 (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) whose parents pay for school meals. If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me. We are here to help you and will do all we can to enable the system to run smoothly for everyone concerned.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs Alison Nettleship
Headteacher

Date:

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 and to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals, Weston Mill Community Primary School has 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 expects 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.parentpay.com (please contact us if there is a genuine reason e.g. no access to a computer or mobile phone, that you are unable to pay in this way and we will try to help)

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the School may grant a debt allowance of 1 meal. However, this debt must be paid the next day 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. 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 Plymouth City Council 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.

If you believe that you may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals please contact the School 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.

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

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Date:

Dear Parent / Carer of

Re: Dinner Money Debt

I am writing to let you know that we have checked the balance on your child's dinner money account today and unfortunately this is currently £..... outstanding.

As you will be aware, all school meals must be paid for in advance using our online payment system **Parentpay**. We would therefore ask that this outstanding amount is brought up to date by the end of today.

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.

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

Headteacher

Date:

Dear Parent / Carer of

Re: Dinner Money Debt

I am writing to let you know that we have checked the balance on your child's dinner money account today and unfortunately this now amounts to - £.....

As stated in Weston Mill Community Primary School's School Meals Debt Recovery Policy, all school meals must be paid for in advance using our online payment system **Parentpay**, 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 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.

If payment is not received with 7 days we will unfortunately have to refer the debt to Plymouth City Council for recovery under their debt recovery procedures. We must apply our policy as we have to ensure that the money given to the school for educational purposes is spent in the correct way.

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

Headteacher