



SCHOOL MEALS DEBT RECOVERY POLICY

Policy Statement

The Woodseats Primary School Debt Recovery Policy has been adopted to ensure that there is a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners. 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 be directly affected by any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered, there by directly affecting all children in school.

The Schools Meals Service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for. It is very time consuming for school to continuously chase parents for money. It is also highly embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative effect on relationships with families. The free school meal system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals.

Parents who meet certain criteria may qualify for Free School Meals. 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 Sheffield City Council Website: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/education/information-for-parentscarers/at-school/school-meals/free-school-meals> or ask at the school office for details.

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 arrange payment in advance for a school dinner.

Payment for School Meals

Payment for School meals must be made at least one week in advance. Parents should ensure that children keep to the specified number of days for which payment has been made. Payment can be made using our online payment system, ParentPay, or by using a Paypoint. When parents/carers log onto ParentPay they can easily see the balance of their account. The school office no longer accepts payments by cash or cheque. Parentpay provides a facility which you can subscribe to which will remind you if your balance becomes low. We encourage you to use this facility.

Management of School Meal Debts

If a child arrives at school without a packed lunch or payment, or if a child's entitlement to free school dinners has ceased, the School will contact the parent/carer in the first instance to establish if alternative arrangements have been made.

If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a note detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting immediate payment. It is then expected that parents/carers will provide a packed lunch, until payment is made.

Where a child continues to take unpaid meals, the School may try 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.

If any debt exceeds £6, and/or action proves unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, the School will inform our Safeguarding Team and formally write to the parent/carer, explaining that the School is not obliged to provide a school dinner where advance payment is not forthcoming or where authorisation for free school dinners has not been received.

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts

The Head Teacher may provide Governors with details of any outstanding dinner money debt and the current position with regard to such debt. The aim of the School's dinner money policy is to minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up. The School reserves 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. Any additional charges incurred in recovering the debt may be passed onto the parent/carer.

Date: January 2016

