

Elmstead Primary School



School Meals Debt Policy

Approved by Governors: 8th October 2018

Review Date: Autumn 2021

This policy has been written to help Elmstead Primary School adopt a consistent approach to debt management regarding the payment of school meals. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the outstanding payments and will also help parents clearly understand our expectations. The school meals service is no different than any other business and the meals must be paid.

Parents should be able to relate to the situation that they cannot take their child to a restaurant e.g. McDonald's and expect them to be given food without paying. Yet a minority of parents in the school expect us to provide food for their children without paying for them.

The governors at Elmstead Primary School feel that a system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach. We understand that this may seem a very hard stance as there has been a culture of debt tolerance in the past 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 UIFSM or FSM entitlement. **Every other meal must be paid for.** Our Sims dinner money system highlights debt immediately so keeping track will be easy.

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

- A letter to parents
- 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 each year, more often when it is first introduced.

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.

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

The letter to parents is attached as Appendix 1.

Key Information

1. All parents are provided with a copy of the debt policy when their child joins the school.
2. All school meals must be paid for in advance.
3. No child should be sent to school with no money in their account and expect to be given a meal.
4. Parents who don't want their child to have a school meal, should provide a healthy packed lunch.

Debt recovery

Level 1 – 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'

Level 2 – 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 a packed lunch in before lunchtime

Level 3 – 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

The head teacher will send a final letter.

Level 4 – 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

Headteacher to contact school's solicitors, small claims court, social services

General Data Protection Regulations

The General Data Protection Regulation came into force on the 25th May 2018. It regulates the way that Data Controllers, such as Elmstead Primary School, process personal data about people (students, parents, employees, etc) and the legal rights that individuals have in relation to that data.

Data Protection is monitored at Elmstead Primary School by its Information Governing Board, which reports to its Data Protection Officer.

Elmstead Primary School's temporary Data Protection Officer is: Mrs Jackie Vaughan

Contact details as follows:

Address: Elmstead Primary School, Elmcroft, Holly Way, Elmstead Market, Colchester, Essex. CO7 7YQ

Email: bursar@elmstead.essex.sch.uk

Phone: 01206 822889

Elmstead Primary School complies with information legislation.

Review

The governing body reviews this policy every three years. They may, however, review the policy earlier than this, if the government introduces new regulations, or if the governing body receives recommendations on how the policy might be improved.

Appendix 1

Elmstead Primary School

A Foundation School
Headteacher: Mr I. MacDonald



Elmcroft
Holly Way
Elmstead Market
Colchester
Essex CO7 7YQ

Tel: (01206) 822889

Fax: (01206) 827219

Email: admin@elmstead.essex.sch.uk

31st October 2016

Dear Parents / Carers

Elmstead Primary School Meals Debt Policy 2018

Elmstead Primary School adopts a **NO DEBT** policy relating to the payment of school meals.

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 any unpaid meals. I am sure that everybody will agree that this is unacceptable and we hope that all parents give this policy their full support. As we all know, nobody takes their child to McDonald's and expects them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school.

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.

School meals must be paid for in advance using any of the methods of payment outlined below:

- Online using our SIMS AGORA payments
- Send cash or cheque in a marked envelope

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of one meal. However this debt must be paid next day and future meals must be paid in advanced before any meal is provided.

If a 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 come to school with the money or provide a packed lunch before lunchtime. We, at Elmstead cannot see a child being unfed and therefore at this stage if no meal is provided by the parent the school will provide the child with a packed lunch consisting of: a sandwich; a piece of fruit and a glass of milk.

If payment of the debt is not received by the next day, the Headteacher reserves the right to inform the Chair of the Governors and Finance Committee who may decide to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt. Social Services may also be informed that these parents are not carrying out the responsibility of care by not providing food for their children at lunchtime.

We hope that by implementing this debt policy we are able to help parents manage school meal money better and at the same time ensure that all the money that is for children's learning is available.

If for any reason your circumstances change and you find yourself experiencing financial difficulty, or have any concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me at which time we can discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely

Mr Ian MacDonald
Headteacher

