

Hatfield Peverel St Andrew's Junior School



School Meal Debt Recovery Policy

Approved by: Governing Body

Date: December 2022

Last reviewed on: November 2021

Next review due by: December 2023

School Meals Debt Recovery Policy

This policy has been written to assist the school in adopting a consistent approach to parents who have an outstanding amount on their school dinner account, whereby a dinner has been ordered and provided but the school has not received payment.

It provides clarity and consistency in managing this situation and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

This policy only relates to pupils whose parents pay for school meals. Occasionally a decision will have to be made as to whether a child should be refused a meal due to the school not receiving payment. The catering facility is available to all children and dinners can be ordered on a daily basis, but is only available when parents have paid on line using the school payment system (Pay360) or by cash or cheque handed into the school office.

The Free School Meals system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals and are in receipt of certain benefits:-

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit - if you apply on or after 1 April 2018 your household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you get)

Applications should be made at <https://www.essex.gov.uk/free-school-meals> and office staff can support and assist all parents to set this system up and therefore all meals would be covered for payment under these circumstances.

A small number of parents expect the school to provide a meal for their child/ren without actually paying for it; however this practice would not be accepted in any other restaurant when ordering meals.

It is not acceptable that office staff have to constantly make telephone calls, send letters or statements to parents requesting immediate payment to clear their accounts. This has such a negative effect on relationships with some families and can cause embarrassment for the children in question. The governors at Hatfield Peverel St Andrew's Junior School have decided that to ensure a consistent approach a 'no debts' policy will be adopted.

Historically this has not been the case, parents that have had a 'debt' for dinners in the past see it as being acceptable. However the school can no longer continue with this, parents have to understand that the only free meals provided will be to those children who qualify for the FSM entitlement.

All school meals have to be paid for, the on line payment system will automatically track all outstanding amounts on a weekly basis, therefore showing all accounts that are in a debt situation. From this information contact will be made to the parent.

This policy appears on the school website and can be sent out upon request so that all parents are aware of their obligation for paying for school meals. This will ensure that all parents receive the same message in a consistent way. All parents will be reminded about the policy when their child joins St Andrew's Junior School.

Key Information.

1. All parents have access to this policy when their child starts the school and upon request.
2. All school lunches must be paid for in advance.
3. No parent should send a child to school with no money in their account and expect the child to be given a meal.
4. Parents who do not want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch or take their child home for lunch.

Debt Recovery Policy Information

When a child's account shows an outstanding amount, (the maximum of one week's dinners) a statement will be issued and sent out to the parent informing them that immediate payment is due the next day that their child is in school.

If the child comes into school without payment for the amount owing and does not have a packed lunch, the parent is to be contacted by telephone. The parent is obliged to pay this amount either on the online system or by bringing the cash/cheque into school that day to allow a meal for the child. However, if they are unable to make the payment at that time the parent is liable to bring a packed lunch in and on any other day following until they are able to clear the entire debt.

If in the event an outstanding amount is not paid in full within an agreed time from when the parents have been notified the Headteacher will send a letter formally requesting payment.

Following the letter from the Headteacher, if payment is not received within 30 days the matter will be referred to the Governing Body for consideration.

The Governing Body will consider each case and may decide to pursue the debt through the Small Claims Court. Before pursuing this claim the letter shown in Appendix 1 will be sent giving a further 30 days to settle the debt.

Appendix 1

Dear

Re: Outstanding Dinner Monies - £

Despite repeated requests the debt of £ or meals previously supplied has not been paid. I note that there has been no response to the letter sent on the requesting payment.

At this difficult financial time as I am sure you are aware that all schools are finding it increasing difficult to manage with the limited budget provided. The Governing Body have a responsibility to ensure that the funds available are used to provide the best possible educational experience for all children attending the school.

The Governing Body have therefore reluctantly asked that I write to you on their behalf requesting full payment of the outstanding amount of £ . I have enclosed a full statement of account for your child.

I would like a reply as soon as possible so that I know you have received this letter. If you don't agree to the payment could you please then send me a detailed response saying why you don't agree.

If I do not receive a satisfactory response from you within 30 days of the date of this letter, I intend to issue proceedings against you in the county court without further notice. This may increase your liability for costs.

The Governors are aware that the proceedings could result in a County Court Judgement against you which could prejudice your credit worthiness. Nevertheless, as the debt has been outstanding since without any payment there is no other option available.

I refer you to the Practice Direction on pre-action conduct under the Civil Procedure Rules, and in particular to paragraph 13-16 which sets out the sanctions the court may impose if you fail to comply with the Practice Direction.

I look forward to your acknowledgement.

Yours sincerely

Chair of Governors