

St. Bridget's CE Primary School Debt Policy



Approved by: SLT and Governors

Date: June 2019

Last reviewed on:

Next review due by: September 2022

CRC Links

Article 28 (Right to Education): Every child has the right to an education. Primary education must be free. Secondary education must be available to every child. Discipline in schools must respect children's dignity. Richer countries must help poorer countries achieve this.

Article 29 (Goals of education): Children's education should help them use and develop their talents and abilities. It should also help them learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people.

Background

The St. Bridget's CE Primary School Debt Policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners. As the Local Education 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 have to directly fund any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered thereby directly affecting the amount of money that is available to provide education to all pupils.

Provision of School Meals

The Schools Meals Service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for by someone. Free School Meals are available for parents who meet certain criteria including the receipt of state benefits. Anyone who may qualify for Free School Meals should contact the school office for further information. 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 school website: [Link for website](#)

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 set up payment through Parent Pay to pay for school dinners.

Cost of School Meals

School meals are available to children at a cost of £2.05 per day or at no cost to those in receipt of Free School Meals entitlement. School meals must be paid for in advance. Any revision to the school meal prices will be notified to parents/carers the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

Payment for School Meals

Please make payments through ParentPay (link for [ParentPay](#)).

Management of School Meal Debts

To ensure that the School's budget is not adversely affected by the cost of School meal debt the Governors consider the fairest system to all families is to pursue a 'Zero Tolerance' approach. Although, this may seem harsh to some parents it is important that the school budget is spent for the benefit of all our pupils and not a small number. If a child arrives at school without a packed lunch or payment made on ParentPay, or if a child's entitlement to free school dinners has ceased, the School will telephone the parent/carer in the first instance to establish if alternative arrangements have been made. When/if a parent has failed to produce any meal or payment for their child, the school may allow a meal to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary

situation. e.g. Forgotten payments for dinner money, temporary hardship etc. These instances will be recorded on the ParentPay system and will accrue as debt that will need to be paid promptly. If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a letter detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting payment directly to the school within 7 days. Prompt action will be taken to address any debt issue at an early stage in order to prevent arrears amassing.

Where a child continues to require meals, the School must 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 Headteacher.

Debt recovery - Step 1

When the debt exceeds £20 for a child or family an email via parent pay (and as a letter) will be sent to the parent/carer informing them to provide their child/children with a packed lunch to prevent further arrears. If the child/children is/are not provided with the requested packed lunch and the parent/carer cannot be contacted, the School will provide a sandwich and a drink only

Debt Recovery – Step 2

If the debt exceeds £30 for a family and/or action proves unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, the kitchen should inform the Headteacher who will 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 (Example letter 1).

Debt Recovery – Step 3

The School does however, reserve the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal debts and inform the local authority safeguarding team that a child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time by parents.

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts

At each meeting of the Finance Committee, the Head Teacher will 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 and incurring costly referral to the School's solicitors. All Write-offs of outstanding debt must be approved by the Governing Body/Finance Committee following submission of details of the debt by the Head Teacher together with reasons for no further action being taken.

Example – Letter 1

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

(Address Line 1)

(Address Line 2)

(Address Line 3)

(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)

I am writing regarding the current level of outstanding school meal debt that is showing on your account. Despite previous correspondences and messages the debt for your child xx in Class xx is still outstanding. The School's records show that as at xx/xx/xx your account is £x in debt. The current cost of a school meal is £x per day or £x per week. I would ask that you please make arrangements to clear this debt immediately and take steps to ensure your account is kept in credit in the future.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information. Remember that Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify, your child will then receive a School meal each day.

Since the School has to fund all school meal debts from its budget it is essential that all payments are up to date so that the quality of the service provided to all pupils is maintained. Unfortunately, if your child's debt is not cleared by xxxxx and there is no explanation the school will contact the local authority safeguarding team.

At this point the School reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the outstanding debt and to inform the local authority that your child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher