

# A St. Michael's CE (VA) Junior School Policy



## SCHOOL MEALS DEBT POLICY

Ratified by Business Management & Resources Committee.	Spring 2018
To be reviewed:	Spring 2021
Ratified by Business Management & Resources Committee.	Spring 2021

## **Background**

St. Michael's Junior School has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy which has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners. 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 debts incurred by parents. Every parent will agree that this is unacceptable and we request that all parents give this policy their full support.

## **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 Essex County Council. 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 Essex County Council's website:

<http://www.essex.gov.uk/education-schools/schools/pupil-parent-support/pages/healthy-living-school-meals.aspx>

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 send payment in advance for a school dinner.

## **Cost of School Meals**

School meals are available to children at a cost of £2.10 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**

Payment for school dinners should be made via the ParentPay online system in advance of dinners being taken. Any money received by the School Office via cheque or cash for school dinners should be recorded immediately on the ParentPay system so that the parent can see the credit being made to their account. The School must ensure that all dinner money collected via the School Office is banked in a timely manner and the banking recorded on ParentPay in accordance with the School's Financial Regulations, which are periodically inspected by audit.

## **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.

When a child has failed to produce dinner money and the parent is either uncontactable or fails to produce a packed lunch when requested, the school may allow a meal to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary situation. e.g. Lost or forgotten dinner money, temporary hardship etc. however details should be recorded in writing and a record maintained and monitored. 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.

Where a child continues to require meals, and a debt of more than £10.50 is accrued, and the parent is either uncontactable or fails to produce a packed lunch when requested, the School will provide a sandwich and a drink only. The school will follow the process outlined in appendix 1 which is detailed below:

### **Level 1**

Indicator: A child's account goes into debt (more than £10.50)

- 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' (Text, phone, email)*

### **Level 2**

Indicator: 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 and Example letter 1 sent home*

Someone will phone the parent to ask them to either bring money or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime.

### **Level 3**

Indicator: 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 Example letter 2*

The head teacher will send a final letter on school headed paper.

### **Level 4**

Indicator: 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*

LEA to advise, small claims court, social services

### **Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts**

At each meeting of the Governing Body/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 minimize the opportunity for debt balances to build up and incurring costly referral to the School's solicitors. The School does however, reserve 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.

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.

## Appendix 1

### Debt policy implementation

#### Key Information

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

#### Level 1

Indicator: A child's account goes into debt (more than £10.50)

- 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' (Text, phone, email)*

#### Level 2

Indicator: 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 and Example letter 1 sent home*

Someone will phone the parent to ask them to either bring money or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime..

#### Level 3

Indicator: 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 Example letter 2*

The head teacher will send a final letter on school headed paper.

**Level 4**

Indicator: 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*

LEA to advise, small claims court, social services

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)**

According to the School's financial records you have not paid dinner money for your child (pupil name) in Class: xx. As at xx/xx/xx your account is showing a debt of £xx.

In order that the school's budget is not used to clear your child's debt please make arrangements for the outstanding dinner money debt to be paid immediately. Once you have cleared the current debt I should be grateful if you could ensure that you keep your account in credit. The current cost of a school meal is £x per day or £x per week.

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.** Additional information and an application form can be found on the Essex County Council's website or in the school office if you do not have access to the Internet:

<http://www.essex.gov.uk/education-schools/schools/pupil-parent-support/pages/healthy-living-school-meals.aspx>

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or wish to discuss the matter further please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

Example 2

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.** Additional information and an application form can be found on the Essex County Council's website or in the school office if you do not have access to the Internet:

<http://www.essex.gov.uk/education-schools/schools/pupil-parent-support/pages/healthy-living-school-meals.aspx>

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 the debt is not cleared by xxxxx a school meal will no longer be provided to your child and you must make your own arrangements for your child's lunch. 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

Head Teacher



## **Debt policy implementation**

### **Key Information**

5. All parents are provided with a copy of the debt policy when their child joins the school.
6. All school lunches must be paid for in advance
7. No child should be sent to school and expect to be given a meal
8. Parents who don't want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch

### **Level 1**

Indicator: 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' (Text, phone, email or letter Appendix 1)**

### **Level 2**

Indicator: 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 and Appendix 3 sent home**

Someone will phone the parent to ask them to either bring money or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime..

### **Level 3**

Indicator: 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 Appendix 4**

The head teacher will send a final letter on school headed paper.

**Level 4**

Indicator: 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**

LEA to advise, small claims court, social services