

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



SCHOOL MEALS DEBT POLICY

At St Michael's, by God's love and through our Christian values of Love, Faith, Respect and Courage, we celebrate uniqueness and nurture curiosity, enabling each child to flourish on their own rich learning journey; whilst contributing to the wider community.

By God's love, we all flourish together.

Reviewed & ratified by B. M. & Resources/FGB	24.4.24
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This policy has been written to assist St Michael's in adopting a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners and 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. If debts are incurred, these cannot be financed out of the school budget as this would mean that money, which should be spent on the children's education, would be used to pay for debts incurred by parents. Every parent will agree that this is unacceptable and unfair and we request that all parents give this policy their full support. This policy only relates to pupils whose parents pay for school meals.

The Governors ask that parents ensure there is no debt incurred on dinner money accounts. Chasing payments could contribute to difficult relationships with families and could cause embarrassment for the children in question.

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, on ParentPay.
3. No child should be sent to school and expect to be given a meal without payment being received.
4. Parents who don't want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch.

Provision of School Meals

The School's Meals Service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for.

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>

Please contact the school office who will be happy to support you in your application, if required:

If you think your child may be eligible to receive free school meals, there is now a fast and easy new way to check and prove eligibility. Simply visit the 'Free School Meals and Pupil Premium Checker at the London Grid for Learning website at www.fsm.lgfl.net and click 'Check Eligibility' and 'Create a New Account'.

The Local Authority is Essex, and you will also need to select your child's school. (St Michael's CofE (VA) Junior School, CM2 8RR).

You will then need to supply your Name, NI number and Date of Birth. If eligible, you simply print a copy to bring to the office or save the 'Certificate of Eligibility' and send it to the office email address – admin@st-michaels-jun.essex.sch.uk.

Your child may be able to get free school meals if you get any of the following:

- 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)

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 £2.70 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 half term prior to the new charge taking effect.

Procedures

School meals should be paid for in advance of meals being taken. All payments are made online through ParentPay, which can be accessed via the internet on <https://www.parentpay.com/>.

Meals may be paid for on a daily, weekly, half termly or termly basis, in advance.

The cost of a school meal is £2.70. The minimum payment accepted for meals is £2.70.

Children will not be provided with a school meal unless it is paid for, except those that are entitled to free school meals.

If a parent/carer genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of up to £5.40 per child. However, this debt must be paid immediately on request before any further meals are provided.

As soon as school are notified that a child is leaving, a member of the office staff will run a check on the balance of the child's account. Any debt outstanding must be paid in full, and any credit balance above £5 will be refunded automatically.

Balances below £5 will be refunded on request. If a sibling remains at the school any balance will be transferred to the sibling unless a refund is requested.

Payment for School Meals

All school meals have to be paid for and the online 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 with the parents. Payment for school dinners should be made via the ParentPay online system in advance of dinners being taken.

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 not allow debt to accumulate as it is important that the school budget is spent for the benefit of all our pupils and not a small number.

When dinner money has not been paid and a debt of £5.40 (two days dinner money) has accrued, the school will send an email informing them of the debt owed and that a hot meal will not be provided until the debt is cleared. Parents will need to provide a packed lunch for their child. If the parent is either uncontactable

or fails to produce a packed lunch owing to the debt, the school may allow a cold snack to be provided for that day 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. Payment plans can also be discussed in person with Mrs. Prigg or Mrs. Cullen.

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 and a second email will then be sent. The parent is obliged to pay this amount using the online system to allow a meal for the child. However, if they are unable to make the payment at that time, the parent can bring a packed lunch to school for their child on that day. A packed lunch should be provided on every subsequent day until the parent(s) are able to clear the entire debt.

The child will be informed by a member of the office staff that s/he will be receiving a cold meal, not a chosen hot meal, on the day(s) when their dinner money account is in debt.

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 and the parent will need to provide a packed lunch from then on.

The school will follow the process outlined below when school dinner money debt occurs:

Step 1: The school checks the dinner debt system daily and will send out system generated emails or make a phone call to all parents owing Dinner Money regardless of the amount of debt. See Email 1 template in appendix.

Step 2: For those debts which received a phone call or email message previously, and the debt has not been cleared the following day, a further phone call will be made, or email will be sent, by one of the office team to find out when the debt will be cleared. The parent/carer will also be reminded that a packed lunch must be provided from home until the debt is cleared. See Email 2 template in appendix.

Step 3: For those debts that have received two phone calls or emails and the debt has reached £5.40, "Debt Letter One" will be sent via the child requesting the immediate payment of the outstanding debt. This letter is passed to the parents by the class teacher at the end of the day/sent by email and/or will be sent via Royal Mail.

If the parent is either uncontactable or fails to produce a packed lunch owing to the debt, the school will allow a cold snack to be provided for that day.

Step 4: The School Business Manager will contact the parent by telephone to arrange an appointment to discuss the outstanding dinner debt with the parent.

Step 5: If the meeting under step 4 is not kept or a satisfactory situation agreed, a debt letter will be sent via email and Royal Mail recorded Delivery – "Debt Letter Two".

For Debts, which remain outstanding after the above actions are taken, will be referred to the governing body, to decide on further action. This may include legal action to recover the outstanding amount.

If parents fall into debt more than three times in a term the school reserves the right to refuse to provide meals for the rest of the term.

If any monies are outstanding at the end of the academic year, the school reserves the right to charge an administration fee for time taken to recoup this outstanding debt.

It is acknowledged that on occasions, families have financial difficulties and in these proven circumstances, the school will work hard with the family to agree a solution, which is not to the detriment of the child.

In the event of a child leaving the school with an outstanding debt, the governing body will need to consider what further steps to take.

Once the debt has been paid, the child may resume having school meals that are paid for in advance.

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 minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up and incur costly referrals to the school's solicitors. The Governors do however reserve the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal debts. Governors may also choose to inform the local authority that a child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time by the parent, because this action could be described as neglect and may be regarded as a safeguarding issue.

APPENDIX.

Email 1

Dear

Pupil: Class:

I am writing to remind you that according to our records, you have arrears on your child's dinner money account. Please can you ensure that this outstanding amount is cleared.

Our records show that for your child, Class: and your debt is

In order that the school's budget is not used to clear your child's debt, which will affect the funds available for the curriculum, **please arrange for this to be paid immediately** by using ParentPay, our secure online payment system.

The current cost of a school meal is £2.70 per day or £13.50 per week.

Until the debt is cleared, please provide your child(ren) with a healthy packed lunch or arrange to take them home for lunch.

Non-payment for school meals affects the quality of service we are able to offer to the children therefore we need to ensure that all accounts are up to date at all times.

Yours sincerely

Rowen Prigg
Headteacher

Email 2

Dear

Pupil: Class:

I am writing to remind you that according to our records, you still have arrears on your child's dinner money account despite previous reminders. Please can you ensure that this outstanding amount is cleared.

Our records show that for your child, class, and your debt is.....

In order that the school's budget is not used to clear your child's debt, which will affect the funds available for the curriculum, **please arrange for this to be paid immediately** by using ParentPay, our secure online payment system, or by bringing cash or a cheque into the school office.

The current cost of a school meal is £2.70 per day or £13.50 per week.

Until the debt is cleared, please provide your child(ren) with a healthy packed lunch or arrange to take them home for lunch.

Non-payment for school meals affects the quality of service we are able to offer to the children therefore we need to ensure that all accounts are up to date at all times.

Yours sincerely

Rowen Prigg
Headteacher

Letter 1

Address

Date

Dear

School Meals provided to (child's name)

I am writing regarding the current level of outstanding school meal debt that is showing on your account. According to the School's financial records, as of..... your account is in debt.

The current cost of a school meal is £2.70 a day.

The school's budget cannot be used to clear your child's debt so please can you make arrangements for the outstanding dinner money to be paid immediately via ParentPay.

Unfortunately, as the debt has not been reduced, as stated in previous emails, a school meal will no longer be provided to your child and you must make your own arrangements for your child's lunch.

If you would like to discuss arrangements or any difficulties, you may be experiencing please feel free to make an appointment with myself or Mrs Cullen so we can assist you.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, you can visit the 'Free School Meals and Pupil Premium Checker at the London Grid for Learning website at www.fsm.lgfl.net and click 'Check Eligibility' and 'Create a New Account'.

The Local Authority is Essex, and you will also need to select your child's school. (St Michael's CofE (VA) Junior School, CM2 8RR).

You will then need to supply your Name, NI number and Date of Birth. If eligible, you simply print a copy to bring to the office or save the 'Certificate of Eligibility' and send it to the office email address – admin@st-michaels-jun.essex.sch.uk.

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.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or wish to discuss that matter further, please do not hesitate to contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

I look forward to your acknowledgement.

Yours faithfully

Mrs Rowen Prigg
Head Teacher

Letter 2

Address

Date

Dear

School Meals provided to (child's name)

Further to my letter of.....I am writing regarding the current level of outstanding school meal debt that is shown on your account. Despite previous correspondence and messages, the debt for your child in Class is still outstanding. The school's records show that as at your account is in debt.

The current cost of a school meal is £2.70 per day.

I would now like to invite you for a meeting to discuss a payment plan to clear this balance. Please could you contact the school office to suggest some days and times that would suit you. Until we meet, please continue to provide your child with a packed lunch.

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.

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

I look forward to your acknowledgement.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Jane Cregan-Bird
Chair of Governors

