

Title: School Meal Debt Management Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Buckingham Park Church of England Combined School is a Voluntary Aided School serving the whole community. We aim to provide the highest quality all round education, for each and every child, in partnership with parents, within the context of a Christian community. In short, 'Excellence, through God who strengthens us'.
- 1.2. The Governing Body is responsible for ensuring that procedures are in place for the recovery of any outstanding debt.
- 1.3. The school will take all reasonable measures to vigorously collect debts as part of its management of public funds. A debt will be written off only after all reasonable measures (commensurate with the size and nature of the debt) have been taken to recover it.
- 1.4. The school's debt recovery policy will observe the relevant financial regulations and guidance set out in the Scheme for Financing Schools and any other legal requirements.
- 1.5. The procedures to secure the collection of all debts are outlined below and should be followed by all School staff.
- 1.6. Debt recovery procedures should be applied in accordance with this policy.

2. School Meals

- 2.1. The Governing Body has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy relating to payments for school meals.
- 2.2. Parent/s must pay in advance for the school lunch using any of the methods of payment outlined below:
 - Online using ParentPay (This is our preferred method of payment)
 - Using the PayPoint network (parents can request to use this system through the school office)
- 2.3. If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of 1 meal. However, this debt must be paid next day and future meals must be paid in advanced before any meal is provided.
- 2.4. If the debt is not cleared, parents must either provide a packed lunch or take the child home for lunch. In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the head teacher will phone the parent to ask them to come to school with the money or ask them to pay online immediately. Otherwise they must provide sandwiches before lunch time or arrange to take their child home for lunch.

2.5. If payment of the debt is not received by the next day, the Headteacher reserves the right 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.

3. Reporting of outstanding debt levels

3.1. The School Business Manager will ensure that the level of outstanding debt is regularly monitored.

3.2. Suitable records will be maintained to detail individual debts and the total value of debt to the school in order that it can be determined at any time and reported to the relevant committee.

3.3. The Governing Body Resources Committee will review the level of outstanding debts every term to determine whether this level is acceptable and whether action to recover debts is effective.

4. Communication with parents

4.1. All parents are informed of the debt policy when their child joins the school. The communication will include the following key information:

- All school lunches must be paid for in advance
- No child should be sent to school with no money in their account and expect to be given a meal
- Parents who don't want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch or arrange to take them home for lunch

5. Debt Recovery Procedures

5.1. Where payment from the parent/guardian has not been received in advance, the following process should be applied.

Level	Indicator	Action	Checks to be made at every level
1	A child's account goes into debt	Send a 'Gentle debt reminder' (Appendix 1)	Check 1: Is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
2	A child comes to school again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch	Personal contact: Someone will phone the parent to ask them to either bring money or pay online or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime or arrange to take their child home at lunchtime.	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?
3	The parent does not comply with any of these options,	Send a 'strong debt letter' (Appendix 2)	Check 4: Has the parent made contact?
4	The parent consistently does not comply with any of these options	LA to advise, legal services, small claims court, social services	Check 5: Has the parent received school communications?

6. Repayment terms

- 6.1. Debtors are expected to settle the amount owed by a single payment as soon as possible after receiving the first 'gentle debt reminder' (Level 1).
- 6.2. If people are unable to pay the School may reduce or cancel a debt in certain circumstances. A sensitive approach to debt recovery will be carried out, taking the following factors into account.
 - Hardship: Where paying the debt would cause financial hardship.
 - Ill health: Where our recovery action might cause further ill health.
 - Time: Where the debt is so large compared to the person's income that it would take an unreasonable length of time to pay it all off.
 - Cost: Where the value of the debt is less than the cost of recovering it.
 - Multiple debt: Where someone owes more than one debt to the School. In this situation an attempt to agree one repayment plan to include all debts will be established.
- 6.3. If a debtor requests 'repayment terms' these may be negotiated at the discretion of the Headteacher.
 - A record of all such agreements entered into will be retained.
 - In all cases, a letter will be issued to the debtor confirming the agreed terms for repayment.
 - The settlement period should be the shortest that is judged reasonable.

7. Costs of debt recovery

- 7.1. Where the school incurs material additional costs in recovering a debt then the Resources Committee of the Governing Body will decide whether to seek to recover such costs from the debtor.
- 7.2. The debtor will be formally advised in writing that they will be required to pay the additional costs incurred by the school in recovering the debt.

8. Debt 'Write Off'

- 8.1. The decision to write off any debt requires the approval of the Resources Committee of the Governing Body.
- 8.2. A record of the write-off, the reason for it, and the approval for it, will be retained for 7 years (Appendix 3).

9. Policy Review

- 9.1. This policy will be reviewed and approved annually by the Resources Committee and reported to the Full Governing Body.

APPENDIX 1 – SAMPLE ‘GENTLE DEBT REMINDER’ LETTER

Buckingham Park Church of England Primary School

Parent or carer of Joe Bloggs
Jubilee Square
Aylesbury
Buckinghamshire

[DATE]

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child Joe Bloggs (Class: 1C)

As at [DATE] your account is showing a debt of **£xx.xx**

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately. Once the debt is cleared please ensure the account is always in credit.

You can make payment using the secure online payment system ‘ParentPay’. Go to www.parentpay.com and log in using the following username and password:

Username: xxxxxx

Password: yyyyyyy

You can check the account balance anytime by logging into your ParentPay account at www.parentpay.com. You can see what meals have been taken and when.

If you have any difficulty paying using ParentPay, please contact us through the school office and we will help you to make payment.

The cost of a school meal is £2.40 per day (£12 per week).

The School has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy relating to the school meal service so please ensure that your child’s account balance is maintained.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

APPENDIX 2 – SAMPLE ‘STRONG DEBT REMINDER’ LETTER

Buckingham Park Church of England Primary School

Parent or carer of Joe Bloggs
Jubilee Square
Aylesbury
Buckinghamshire

[DATE]

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child Joe Bloggs (Class: 1C) despite a previous written reminder and a telephone call.

As at [DATE] your account is showing a debt of **£xx.xx**

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately. Once the debt is cleared please ensure the account is always in credit.

You can make payment using the secure online payment system ‘ParentPay’. Go to www.parentpay.com and log in using the following username and password:

Username: xxxxxx

Password: yyyyyyy

You can check the account balance anytime by logging into your ParentPay account at www.parentpay.com. You can see what meals have been taken and when.

If you have any difficulty paying using ParentPay, please contact us through the school office and we will help you to make payment.

The cost of a school meal is £2.40 per day (£12 per week).

Since non-payment for school meals affects the quality of service we offer to the children, we need to ensure that all payments are up-to-date and I am afraid that if the debt is not cleared by the end of this week it will not be possible to provide your child with a school meal. You will need to make your own arrangements for your child’s lunch.

The school reserves the right to begin legal proceeding to recover the debt and to inform social services of our concerns that you are not providing a meal for your child at lunch time.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

