

School Meals Debt Policy



Oakmeadow C E Primary & Nursery School

Reviewed and adopted: Sept 19

Next Review due: Sept 22

This policy has been written to help us to adopt a consistent approach to debt. It provides clarity and consistency in managing debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

The Free School Meals system is for parents who cannot afford school meals. Applying for free school meals is straightforward and parents can apply to Shropshire Council and assuming eligibility is authorised the child can take a free school meal the following school day. The school can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for FSM entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for. The ParentPay system highlights debt immediately so keeping track will be easy.

School Meals Debt Policy for Parents

Oakmeadow CE Primary and Nursery School has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy relating to the school meal service. 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.

No parent would take their child to McDonalds and expect them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school. If parents believe that their children may qualify for entitlement to free school meals please ring **0345 678 9000** or email: **fsm@shropshire.gov.uk**. Alternatively visit: **www.shropshire.gov.uk/free-school-meals**. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. Help is available with your application either at the school office or by contacting any of the above number.

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**
- In exceptional circumstances, the school will accept cash or cheque in a marked envelope

Children will not be provided with a school lunch unless it is paid for, except those that are entitled to free school meals. 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. If the debt is not cleared, parents must provide a packed lunch.

In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the school 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. In exceptional circumstances, in individual cases, the school will provide toast for that child as we never want to see a child go without food. **However we emphasise that it is the homes responsibility and accountability to ensure lunch arrangements are in place for their child.**

If a child's school meal account goes into debt then the school office will check:

1. Is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
2. Is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
3. Does this parent normally pay on time, is this just a one off?

Once this has been checked then the following action is then followed:

Action 1:

Personal Contact: The office will phone the parent to ask them to either bring money or pay online or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime.

Action 2:

If payment not received within 1 day then a 'Gentle debt reminder' letter is issued. (Appendix 1)

Action 3:

If payment not received within 5 days then a final debt letter is issued. (Appendix 2)

Action 4: bring in outside agencies

School to notify outside agencies who will initiate further action. If payment of the debt is not received, 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.

We hope that by implementing this debt policy we are able to help parents manage school dinner money better and at the same time ensure that all money that is for children's learning is available.

If you have any concerns please don't hesitate in contacting me.

Yours sincerely

Mrs C Whelan

Head Teacher

APPENDIX 1

Oakmeadow CE Primary & Nursery School

Parent or carer of [insert name]
[Insert Address]

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child [insert name]
As at [insert date] your account is showing a debt of [insert amount]

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

You have 2 ways to pay:

1. In the secure online payment system ParentPay, using the login already provided, go to www.parentpay.com NB THIS IS OUR PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD

Your username and password are:

Username: [insert username] Password: [insert password]

2. Send in money to school in a marked envelope

No matter how you pay 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.

The cost of a school meal is £xxx per day - £xxx per week.

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

Yours sincerely

Mrs C Whelan

Headteacher

APPENDIX 2

Oakmeadow CE Primary & Nursery School

Parent or carer of [insert name]

[Insert Address]

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child [insert name] despite a previous written reminder and a telephone call

As at [insert date] your account is showing a debt of [insert amount]

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

You have 2 ways to pay:

1. In the secure online payment system ParentPay, using the login already provided, go to www.parentpay.com NB THIS IS OUR PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD

Your username and password are:

Username: [insert username] Password: [insert password]

2. Send in money to school in a marked envelope

No matter how you pay 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.

The cost of a school meal is £xxx per day - £xxx 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

Mrs C Whelan

Headteacher