



This policy has been written to enable William Read Primary School 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. School meals provisions are no different to any other business and the meals must be paid for by someone.

Parents can easily relate to the situation that they cannot take their child to a restaurant and expect them to be given food without paying, yet a minority of parents continue to expect free food in school. The Free School Meals system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals, there should be no excuses. Applying for Free School Meals is straight forward and parents can apply online or by the telephone, assuming eligibility is authorised the child can take a free school meal the following school day.

The Governing body of William Read have adopted a 'zero tolerance' approach. This may be tough to implement but with a consistent and transparent approach, it will become easy to maintain once parents realise 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 enables parents to pay for meals in advance and the system highlight debts immediately and will produce letters (Appendix 2&3) to enable quick and easy communication with Parents.

Establishing a debt policy

The school needs to re-launch the Debt Policy using the following:-

- A letter to parents
- The school's newsletter
- The school website

This will ensure that all parents get the same message in a consistent way and this should be reinforced at least once each year. All parents should be provided with a copy of the policy when their child joins the school.

The policy is attached as 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 with no money in their account 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 or arrange to take them home for 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' Appendix 2

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, 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. Free school meals are **stopped**.

Level 3 Indicator: The parent does not comply with any of these options and remain in 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 has this parent made contact?

Action 3: send Strong debt letter Appendix 3 The head teacher will send a final letter.

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: Send a small claims threatening letter

Level 5 Indicator: The parent consistently does not comply with any of these options,

Action 5: Instigate Small Claims proceedings.

Appendix 1: School Meals Debt Policy for Parents

Dear Parents and Carers,

As from 15th May 2018 William Read Primary 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.

Free school meals are universally available for children in:-

- Reception
- Year 1
- Year 2

Parents must pay for a school meal from year 3 and onwards unless they qualify for continued free school meals by getting one of the following benefits:

- 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)

The parents are responsible for applying for continued Free School Meals and more information is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>. If a parent applies successfully the Essex County Council will inform the school that their child is entitled for a free meal. If we do not receive this confirmation then we cannot provide a free meal. If you need assistance with the application process then please ask at the school office.

If you do not qualify for continued free school meals then you must pay in advance using any of the methods of payment outlined below:-

- Online using ParentPay (This is our preferred method)
- Send cash or cheque in a marked envelope
- Use Pay Point

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 will send a reminder letter and the debt must be paid upon receipt.

If the debt is not cleared, the parent will be informed that the school will cease providing a school meal until the debt is paid in full. Under these circumstances 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 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 or arrange to take their child home for lunch.

If the debt remains, the Headteacher reserves the right to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt through the Small Claims Court.

We hope that by implementing this debt policy we will be 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. J. Gosnold
Headteacher

Appendix 2: A Gentle Debt Reminder

20 Jan 2018

Dear Mr A and Ms B

Pupil: AB Class: 5 - Birch

I am writing to remind you that according to our records, you have arrears on your child's dinner money account. In order for your child to continue to receive school lunches it is important to keep your account in credit.

Our records show that for your child AB Class: 5 - Birch at 23 Jan 2018 your debt is
-£14.00

Please arrange for this to be paid immediately by using ParentPay, our secure online payment system. You can use the login previously provided. Please visit www.parentpay.com

Your username and password are:

You can check your account balance at anytime by logging into your ParentPay account.

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. Once the debt is cleared please ensure the account remains in credit.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or if you have difficulty making payment please contact the school office to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely

Mr A Judge
Finance Manager

Appendix 3: A Strong Debt Reminder

23 Jan 2018

Mr A and Ms B

Dear Parent/Carer

Pupil: AB Class: 5 - Birch

Our records show that you have still not paid dinner money for AB Class: 5 - Birch. As at 23 Jan 2018 your account is showing a debt of -£4.00.

I urgently need you to pay this amount by Friday 14th June. We are unable to provide AB with any further lunches until we have received a payment from you.

You will therefore need to provide AB with a packed lunch or take your child home for lunch from Monday 17th June. Our budget cannot sustain the non-payment of school dinners.

Once the debt is cleared please ensure your child's school meal account is always in credit. You have two ways to pay the outstanding amount:

1. Online payment via ParentPay; using the login already provided please visit www.parentpay.com

Your username and password are:

2. Send cash or a cheque in with AB.

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

Yours sincerely

Mrs J Gosnold
Headteacher