



School meal debt Policy

January 2018

'Finding Excellence in Everyone'

This policy has been written to provide a clear and consistent approach to School Meals debt. It provides clarity and consistency in managing School Meals debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them. The policy has been agreed by the Local Committee Members of Sandcross Primary School and will be shared with all parents.

There have been many discussions around whether a child should be refused a meal in school if they have not paid. However the school meals service is no different than any other business and the meals must be paid for by someone. **This cannot be to the disadvantage of other children in the school.**

A good example to use relates to out of school practice; no parent would take their child to McDonalds or any other restaurant and expect them to be given food without paying, or walk out of Tesco's with food and not pay, yet a minority of parents expect free food in school. The Free School Meals system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals, there should be no excuses.

Sandcross Primary School debt policy applies a 'zero tolerance' approach. We can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for FSM entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for.

Schools are invoiced for meals taken, and it is essential that sufficient funds are credited for these meals into the central account, either online or through the cash and cheque deposit process. If there are insufficient funds then schools are asked to cover the shortfall from their budget.

Establishing a debt policy

Schools should first discuss this policy with staff and agree its debt policy with Local Committee Members. Once agreed, schools should make parents aware of this policy. This could be by including it in one or more of the following:

- A letter or text message to parents
- The school's newsletter
- The school brochure
- The school website

This will ensure that all parents get the same message in a consistent way. This should be done at least once each year, more often when it is first introduced.

All parents should be provided with a copy of the policy when their child joins the school.

Debt policy implementation

Key Information

1. All parents are provided with a copy of the debt policy on inception, and will be reminded at the start of each new school year from thereon in.
2. All school lunches must be paid for in advance
3. No child should be sent to school without money in their account and expect to be given a meal
4. Parents who don't want their child to have a school lunch, must provide a healthy packed lunch.

Level 1

Indicator: A child's account goes into debt – **DAY 1**

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 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' by phone.

Level 2

Indicator: A child comes to school the following day, **DAY 2**, still without the debt being paid or a packed lunch provided:

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|---------|--|
| 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

The School Admin Assistant responsible for the monitoring of meals income will phone the parent to request immediate payment either by coming to the school office or by paying on-line. If for any reason this is not forthcoming by the close of business that day, they will be contacted again by phone the following morning and asked to provide a packed lunch.

If no packed lunch has been provided and no payment made, the child will be provided with a basic alternative lunch by the school. This will comprise of bread, butter, jam/marmite, fruit and water. This will be provided by the school office and eaten with the other children in the hall.

The office will continue to attempt to make contact with the parent daily until day 10.

If contact *is* made by the parent and the office are happy that arrangements for imminent payment are genuine, they may decide to allow the child to have a school dinner.

Level 3

Indicator: The parent has not complied with any of these options after 10 days.

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|---------|--|
| 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 strongly worded communication either by e-mail or letter

The Business Manager will send a final communication indicating that the child has been removed from the meals register due to persistent non-payment and that alternative provision

must be made with immediate effect. Once the balance has been cleared, the child may be put back onto the meals register.

Level 4

Indicator: The parent consistently or continually 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?

Having been removed from the meals register, the child will continue to be provided with a basic meal until the debt has been settled or until a packed lunch has been provided. Should this situation extend beyond one week (day 15) there will be an escalation to Action 4.

Action 4: Refer to outside agencies

Where communication has been made with the parent, and the child has been removed from the meals register but the debt is still outstanding, further recovery action will be taken.

Legal action may be instigated where outstanding balances are not paid in full and any monies paid into the school may be re-directed to address this debt. The School is also likely to refer this lack of provision to Surrey Children's Services Team if we feel a duty of care is being neglected.

School Meals Debt Policy for Parents

As from January 2018, Sandcross Primary School will adopt a strict **NO DEBT** policy relating to the school meal service. This Policy was approved by the Local Committee members in December 2017 for enforcement by the school office.

If debts are incurred, then the school budget carries that cost. This means that money which should be spent on the provision of education is instead being 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.

A good example to refer to relates to practices outside of school; no parent would take their child to a restaurant and expect them to be given food without paying, or leave a supermarket without paying the cashier. The same applies at school.

If parents believe that their children may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals please contact the office for more details. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. We will help you all we can with your application.

Parents/carers must pay in advance for the school lunch using any of the methods of payment outlined below:

- Online via the Scopay website **THIS IS OUR PREFERRED METHOD**
- Send cash or cheque in a NAMED envelope ON A MONDAY MORNING to the school office.

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 on a Monday or at the beginning of the school week, the school may grant a debt allowance of 2 days/meals. However this debt must be paid next day and future meals must be paid for in advance before any further meals are provided.

NB: The only time that this practice would **NOT** be followed would be on the first/second day immediately after a half term holiday (depending on In-Service arrangements); this is due to the high volume of payments and on-line pre-payments that are received on the first day of term. *In such instances we will extend the payment window by an additional day.*

Pre-Payment Arrangements for the Half Term:

We appreciate that some parents choose to pre-pay for a half term or monthly period based on their own financial situation e.g. individual pay days. We would still expect all pre-payments to be made on a Monday of any given payment cycle. We will therefore enforce the policy in such instances where a parent has not contacted us advising us of a genuine delay to payment.

If the debt is not cleared in accordance with the suggested payment schedule, parents must provide a packed lunch.

In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the Business Manager will contact the parent to request immediate payment, either to the school office or online. If this is not forthcoming, a packed lunch will be requested.

If payment of the debt is not received by the next school day, the School reserves the right to remove the child permanently from the school meals register. Parents will be contacted informing them of this decision and advising them of the alternative meal provision arrangements.

Legal action may be instigated where outstanding balances are not paid in full and any monies paid into the school may be re-directed to address this debt. The School is also likely to refer this lack of provision to Surrey Children's Services Team if we feel a duty of care is being neglected.

We hope that by implementing this formal policy we are able to help parents manage school dinner money payments better and provide a fair system that does not disadvantage those parents (& children) who do pay regularly and on time. It also affords us the opportunity to clarify the process from the schools perspective, so that all parties are fully aware of their role and expectations.

We look forward to your support.