



## Debt Policy

### Extended services (childcare) and provision of school meals

#### Background

This Debt Policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children attend extended services provision or take a school meal. The Local Authority is not accountable for the administration of extended services, therefore the responsibility falls on the school to pursue instances of non-payment. As a result the school budget will have to directly fund any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered thereby directly affecting the amount of money that is available to provide education to all pupils.

#### Provision of extended services

The extended services provision is no different to any other business in that it has to be paid for by someone. This provision is available to children, but at a cost to the parent / carer.

#### Cost of extended services

Childcare provision is available to children at a cost of £5 per hour. These costs **must** be paid for at the start of each month by the 7<sup>th</sup> day (or the first day the nursery is open following a holiday period). Any revision to the childcare prices will be notified to parents/carers the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

#### Payment for childcare services

Childcare can be paid for by either Parent Pay app, childcare vouchers or tax free childcare.

#### Management of extended services debts

To ensure that the school's budget is not adversely affected by the cost of providing extended services, the governors consider the fairest system to all families is to pursue a 'zero tolerance' approach. Although, this may seem harsh to some parents it is important that the childcare provision does not run at a loss, otherwise the school budget will be affected, and to the detriment of all our pupils. It is also to prevent hardship on families by allowing debts to be created that become difficult to repay.

When payment has failed to be produced for the forthcoming month's provision, the school may allow provision to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary situation, e.g. temporary hardship etc. however, details should be recorded in writing and a record maintained and monitored. Should a family

be late in paying for childcare in advance, the school will issue a letter reminding parents/carers of the terms of the childcare contract (Letter 1). The school will advise the parent/carer that we are not obliged to provide childcare provision where advance payment is not forthcoming

If a child has childcare provision which has not been paid for, (that is childcare has not been paid by the 7<sup>th</sup> day and childcare has been taken with still no payment) a second letter detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting payment immediately or within 3 days at the latest. Prompt action will be taken to address any debt issue at an early stage in order to prevent arrears amassing.

If the debt is not paid and the parent/carer has not made representation to the Headteacher, then the school will write to the parent/carer (letter 3), suspending childcare/lunches.

At any stage of these proceedings, parents are advised to speak to the Headteacher about their situation to avoid any further action being taken.

### **Provision of school meals**

The schools meals service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for by someone.

### **Cost of school meals**

School meals are available to children at a cost of £2.30 per day. School meals must be paid for in advance. Lunch costs are charged to your Parent Pay account as meals are taken so please ensure you credit your account to cover lunches that week. The current cost of a lunch is £2.30. Any revision to the school meal prices will be notified to parents/carers the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

### **Payment for school meals**

Lunch money must be paid for via the Parent Pay app. It is the parents responsibility to ensure that they have credited their child's account to cover each week's meals without falling into arrears.

### **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 pursue a 'zero tolerance' approach. Although, this may seem harsh to some parents it is important that the school budget is spent for the benefit of all our pupils and not a small number.

If a child takes school meals which have not been paid for, a first letter detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting payment directly to the school within 7 days. Prompt action will be taken to address any debt issue at an early stage in order to prevent arrears amassing.

If the debt is not cleared within 7 days and your account returned to credit, you will receive a second letter instructing you to clear the debt within a further 3 days. If the debt is still not cleared after the third day you will then receive a third and final letter instructing you that the provision of lunches will be

suspended for your child. At this point, you will be asked to provide a packed lunch for your child. This is to prevent any further costs being incurred.

### **Monitoring and recovery of debts**

At each meeting of the Governing Body/Finance Committee, the Headteacher will provide governors with details of any outstanding debt. The aim of this policy is to minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up and incurring costly referral to the School's solicitors. The School does, however, reserve the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding Childcare debts and inform the Local Authority, Legal Services.

Should a family be in debt or experiencing difficulty with payments, they may not be required to give the contracted 4 week's notice to terminate childcare. The Head Teacher has the authority to terminate the contract immediately without the notice period after considering the information given by the family.

A debt belongs to a family, not an individual child. Therefore if a family has more than one child in the nursery then suspension of services may affect siblings who attend the nursery at the same time or a later date.

## Letter 1

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)  
(Address Line 1)  
(Address Line 2)  
(Address Line 3)  
(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

### Childcare/lunches provided to (Pupil Name)

According to the School's financial records you have not paid childcare/lunch money or both for your child (pupil name). As agreed on your contract, payments must be made by the 7<sup>th</sup> day of each month for childcare and your lunch money kept in credit. As at xx/xx/xx you owe £xx on your Parent Pay account.

In order that there is no detriment to the school's budget, please clear your child's outstanding balances on Parent Pay immediately or within 7 days at the latest. Once you have cleared the current amount I should be grateful if you could take steps to ensure your account is kept up to date, as you have agreed on your contract.

I would like to remind you that the school is not obliged to provide childcare provision/lunches where advance payment is not forthcoming

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or wish to discuss the matter further please do not hesitate to speak to me in confidence.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

## Letter 2

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

(Address Line 1)

(Address Line 2)

(Address Line 3)

(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

### Childcare/lunches provided to (Pupil Name)

According to the school's financial records you have still not paid childcare/lunch money or both for your child (pupil name) despite previous correspondence asking you to do so. As at xx/xx/xx your Parent Pay account is still showing a debt of £XX and you have taken childcare or lunches which have not been paid for.

In order that there is no detriment to the school's budget, please ensure you clear your child's outstanding balances on Parent Pay immediately or by xx/xx/xx (3 days) at the latest. **Failure to pay within 3 days will result in childcare/lunches being suspended.**

Once you have cleared the current debt I should be grateful if you could take steps to ensure your account is kept up to date, as you have agreed on your contract.

If you have concerns about the contents of this letter I urge you to speak to me as a matter of urgency so we can explore potential solutions.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

### Letter 3

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)  
(Address Line 1)  
(Address Line 2)  
(Address Line 3)  
(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

#### Childcare/lunches provided to (Pupil Name)

I am writing regarding the current level of outstanding debt that is showing on your account. Despite previous correspondences and messages the debt for your child xx is still outstanding. The school's records show that as at xx/xx/xx your account is £x in debt.

As the school's budget will have to fund any overall debt incurred through childcare provision/unpaid lunches, it is essential that all payments are up to date so that the quality of the service provided to all children is maintained. Unfortunately, as your debt has not been cleared, the childcare/lunch provision is now suspended for your child. The school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the outstanding debt and to inform the Local Authority.

If you wish to discuss your situation in confidence and the possibility of creating a payment plan, please speak to me as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher