

East Bridgford St Peter's C. of E. Academy Debt Management Policy



“Together in Achievement”

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1. Introduction

The governing body is responsible for ensuring that procedures are in place for the recovery of outstanding debt.

This policy aims to help us adopt a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers with a view to eliminating it completely. It provides clarity and consistency in managing debt and will also help parents/carers clearly understand what is expected of them.

The services provided by school are no different to those provided by any other business and meals/other services need to be paid for in advance and on demand. For example, most parents/carers understand that they cannot take their child to a restaurant and expect the provision of food without paying or expect a football coach or music teacher to teach their child free of charge.

Most parents make prompt payment for services rendered, however a minority of parents/carers do not pay on time for services provided by the school, putting the school in a position of subsidising a few families with funding that is intended by law for all children, as well as causing considerable extra work for office staff.

Free school meals can only be offered to children whose parents/carers qualify for Free School Meals (FSM) entitlement and/or Universal Free School Meals (UFSMs - applicable to children in Years R-2). FSM are available for parents/carers who meet certain criteria including the receipt of certain state benefits. If you qualify, please do take up your child's entitlement so that they can receive a school meal each day and the school can access Pupil Premium funding.

Parents/carers should be aware that where there is an outstanding debt at school, access to other services (e.g. paid for activity clubs) will not be permitted until the debt is cleared.

2. Provision of School Meals

Payment for school meals should be paid for in advance. The school currently uses ParentPay as our online payment system and parents/carers should ensure that enough funds are added in advance to cover the costs of school meals for their child/children. Please speak to a member of the office staff if you need a reminder of your ParentPay log in.

- If a child arrives at school without a packed lunch or payment, or if a child's entitlement to FSM has ceased, the school will telephone or text the parent/carer in the first instance. The school may allow a meal to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary situation, however this will be recorded and is subject to a maximum of 3 meals.

Any arrears of dinner money that arise **must** be pursued by school on a weekly basis. Prompt action will be taken to address any debt issue at an early stage to prevent arrears amassing.

- When the debt exceeds £10 for a child an email must be sent to the parent/carer informing them the arrears on dinner money is due for payment (appendix 1).
- If the debt exceeds £20 we will advise the parents that we will no longer be able to offer a school dinner until the arrears are paid in full and ask the parent/carer to provide a healthy packed lunch (appendix 2).
- Where a child continues to require meals, the school must establish if the child is entitled to FSM, or if the parent/carer is experiencing hardship which affects their ability to pay. Under these circumstances the parent/carer should be invited to apply for FSM or speak confidentially to the Head Teacher.
- If child/ren continue to arrive at school without a packed lunch and debt remains outstanding, a notification of withdrawal of school meals letter must be issued by the Head Teacher. This will give the parent/carer a final opportunity to clear the outstanding debt before potential legal proceedings. The letter will inform the parent/carer that if the debt is not cleared in full, the child/ren will not be provided with a meal with effect from the following Monday. Whilst looking at the whole picture and vulnerability of the child, school may also contact Local Authority and Children's Services for advice (appendix 3).

3. Provision of Preschool

Preschool sessions (including lunch club and school dinners) must be paid for on or before the date of the session. Fees remain payable even if the child is absent. Ad hoc sessions can be booked, subject to availability, and will be added to ParentPay as applicable.

The school uses ParentPay, and parents/carers are responsible for ensuring sufficient funds are added in advance to cover the costs of sessions not covered by funding for their child/children. If you need a reminder of your ParentPay login details, please speak to a member of the office staff.

Please note that any outstanding debt may result in the suspension or cancellation of services and sessions not covered by funding.

Additionally, 4 weeks' notice is required for any changes to paid sessions. If notice is not given, fees for those sessions will still be incurred.

Preschool arrears must be monitored and pursued by the school on a weekly basis. Prompt action will be taken to address any debt issues early, to prevent arrears from accumulating.

If the debt is not cleared within 7 days of the arrears arising, an email will be sent to the parent/carer informing them that the Preschool arrears are due for payment (Appendix 4). If no payment is received a further reminder will be issued at 14 days (Appendix 5) If debt remains outstanding after 21 days, a notification of withdrawal of the preschool place must be issued by the Head Teacher. This will give the parent/carer a final opportunity to clear the outstanding debt before potential legal proceedings. The letter will inform the parent/carer that if the debt is not cleared in full, the child/ren will not be provided with a preschool place from the (what date?) (Appendix 6).

4. Other Chargeable Goods and Services (paid for activity clubs, fruit, ad-hoc orders)

Charges for any other goods or services must be paid in advance and will be added to ParentPay. If payment is not received by the due date, the order will not be processed, or in the case of a club, the place will be cancelled.

Examples of such charges may include, but are not limited to: paid activity clubs, fruit orders, ad-hoc items (e.g., Year 6 hoodies, personalised fundraising merchandise, Young Voices tickets).

5. Key Information

- A copy of this debt policy is available to view by visiting the school website <https://www.eastbridfordstpeters.co.uk/policies-strategies/> and available as a hard copy from the office
- Parents who are experiencing difficulty in paying for a chargeable service offered by the school should inform the school office immediately. In most circumstances a payment plan can be agreed to help parents clear their debt to the school as soon as possible. Large debts left unpaid may be passed to a professional debt collection firm to legally recover.
- School lunches must be paid for in advance. Parents who don't want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch
- Preschool sessions not covered by funding must be paid for by the session date
- Payment for other chargeable goods and services must be paid for in advance
- Please also see 'St Peter's C of E Academy Charging and Remissions Policy'

6. Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal/Preschool Debts

At each meeting of the Governing Body/Finance Committee, the Head Teacher will provide Governors with a report on any outstanding dinner money and preschool debt, as well as the current status of these debts.

The aim of the school's debt management policy is to minimise the accumulation of debt balances and avoid costly referrals to the school's solicitors. However, the school reserves the right to initiate legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal or preschool debts.

Where appropriate, the school may also notify the local authority if a child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunchtime.

Appendix 1: Reminder letter – school meals

Date

Dear

Name of child/children:

Our records show that despite a text/phone call on xxx you have not paid dinner money for your child/ren.

As at xxx our records show a total debt of £xxx

Please arrange for this money to be paid into your ParentPay account.

The cost of a school meal is £2.95 per day - £14.75 per week and must be paid in advance.

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

Yours sincerely,

Mr R Tomlinson

Head Teacher

Appendix 2: Final warning letter – school meals

Date

Dear

Name of child/children:

Our records show that despite a previous reminder letter on xxx you have not paid dinner money for your child/ren.

As at xxx our records show a total debt of £xxx

Please arrange for this money to be paid into your ParentPay account immediately.

The cost of a school meal is £2.95 per day - £14.75 per week and must be paid in advance.

If the debt remains unpaid, the school will refuse to provide a school meal for the child and you will need to provide them with a healthy packed lunch.

Free School Meals and Milk

Have you checked if your child/ren is/are eligible for benefits-related free school meals and milk? We want to make sure as many eligible pupils as possible are claiming their free school meals. Please see our [website](#) for further information and check your eligibility through Nottinghamshire County Council by phoning 0300 500 8080 or online here: <https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/education/school-meals/free-school-meals-and-milk>

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or would like to speak in confidence about arranging a repayment plan, please contact the school office.

Yours sincerely,

Mr R Tomlinson

Head Teacher

Appendix 3: Notification of withdrawal of school meals letter

Date

Dear

Name of child/children:

Our records show that despite several reminders you have still not paid dinner money for your child/ren.

As at xxx our records show a total debt of £xxx

Please arrange for this money to be paid into your ParentPay account immediately.

The cost of a school meal is £2.95 per day - £14.75 per week and must be paid in advance.

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. If the debt is not cleared by the end of this week, it will not be possible to provide your child with a school lunch with effect from Monday xxx, and you will need to provide a healthy packed lunch.

The school reserves the right for the Head Teacher and Governing Body to begin legal proceedings to recover debt and inform social services of our concerns that you are not providing a meal for your child/ren at lunchtime.

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

Yours sincerely,

Mr R Tomlinson

Head Teacher

Appendix 4: Reminder letter – Preschool (7 days)

Date

Dear

Name of child/children:

Our records indicate that, despite a text/phone call on [insert date], payment has not been received for all the Preschool sessions your child(ren) has/have attended.

As of [insert date], our records show an outstanding balance of £[insert amount]. Please ensure that this amount is paid into your ParentPay account.

Preschool sessions must be paid for by the date of the session.

If you have any questions or concerns about these arrears, please contact the school office at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Mr R Tomlinson

Head Teacher

Appendix 5: Final warning letter – Preschool (14 days)

Date

Dear

Name of child/children:

Our records indicate that, despite a previous reminder letter sent on [insert date], payment has not been received for all the Preschool sessions your child(ren) has/have attended.

As of [insert date], our records show an outstanding balance of £[insert amount]. Please ensure that this amount is paid into your ParentPay account immediately.

If the debt remains unpaid, the school will be unable to continue providing sessions or meals not covered by funding.

If you have any questions about these arrears or wish to discuss arranging a repayment plan in confidence, please contact the school office at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Mr R Tomlinson
Head Teacher

Appendix 6: Notification of withdrawal of Preschool place (21 days)

Date

Dear

Name of child/children:

Our records indicate that, despite several reminders, payment has still not been received for all the Preschool sessions your child(ren) has/have attended.

As of [insert date], our records show an outstanding balance of £[insert amount]. Please ensure this amount is paid into your ParentPay account immediately.

Preschool sessions must be paid for by the date of the session. Therefore, we regret to inform you that the following place(s) not covered by funding will be suspended effective from [insert date]:

[insert sessions]

The school reserves the right for the Head Teacher and Governing Body to initiate legal proceedings to recover the debt and cancel the above Preschool sessions.

If you have any questions about these arrears, please contact the school office as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Mr R Tomlinson

Head Teacher