



Oreston Community Academy

School Meals Debt Recovery Policy

Date Reviewed by the Governing Body: Spring 2022

Next Review date: Autumn 2025

School Meals Debt Recovery Policy

This policy has been written to help our school adopt a consistent approach to debt incurred by parents whose children take school dinners. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

The Free School Meals system is there for parents of children of all ages to claim if they are in receipt of certain benefits; information is available from the school office or from Plymouth City Council website. Free School Meals eligibility also brings valuable additional funding into school to be spent on disadvantaged children and links to Pupil Premium Statement. An online application form can be submitted via the Plymouth City Council website -

<https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/schoolseducationchildcareskillsandemployability/freeschoolmeals>

This policy only relates currently to pupils in Key Stage 2 (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) and Nursery whose parents pay for school meals as all pupils in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are entitled to receive Universal Infant Free School Meals.

The school wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals which they then find difficult to clear.

Oreston Community Academy feel that a system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach. We understand that it may seem a very hard stance as there has been a country-wide culture of debt tolerance. However, it will become easy to maintain once parents realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for FSM or UIFSM entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for. Our school's online cash collection / dinner money system highlights debt immediately so keeping track is easy.

It is very time consuming for our school staff to continually chase parents for payment - by letter, phone call or in person. It is also highly embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative effect on our relationships with families.

There will occasionally be a decision to be made by our school about whether a child should be refused a meal in school if they have not paid. Schools providing meals are no different to a café / restaurant and meals taken must be paid for.

The school will make parents aware of this policy in the following ways:

- a letter to parents;
- reminders in the school newsletter;
- the School website.

This will ensure that all parents get the same message in a consistent way. This will be done at least once each year and all parents will be reminded about the policy when their child joins Key Stage 2.

The letter to parents is attached as Appendix 1.

Key Information

1. All school lunches must be paid for in advance.
2. Parents should ensure that there is sufficient funds in a child's account to pay for school meals in advance. We appreciate that parents may forget to add money to their account. A text will be sent on the day the debt begins to remind parents that their account is empty and needs a top up.
3. Where a debt has accrued amounting to £10.50 (5 meals), parents will be asked to provide packed lunches from home until the debt has been cleared.
4. Parents who do not want their child to have a school meal should provide a healthy packed lunch.

Debt Recovery policy implementation

Daily /Weekly check

£2.10 - £10.50 debt

- Debt report checked
- A reminder letter, text or phone call will be given to all parents reminding them to top up account

£10.50 debt to £25

- A reminder letter will be issued to all asking parents to top up account before any further meals are ordered and to send their child to school with a packed lunch (Appendix 2)

£26 plus

- A letter will be issued to parents asking that debt needs to be cleared within 7 days or that the debt will be referred to the Trust for recovery under their debt recovery procedures. Parents will again be asked to not order any meals until their account is in credit and to send their child to school with a packed lunch (Appendix 3)

Policy date: February 2022

Review date: Spring 2025

Written by: Marie Beaven-Smith

Appendix 1

Dear Parents / Carers

School Meals Debt Recovery Policy – Key Stage 2 children

Due to an increase in the number of school meals that are regularly not being paid for and to avoid a situation that allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals, we have, like all other schools, decided to adopt a **No Debt** policy relating to school meals.

We hope that all parents will give this policy their full support to ensure that the school funding is being spent on educational purposes to help all children succeed. As we know, when visiting cafes and restaurants, we would not expect to be given meals without paying; the same applies for schools.

School meals must be paid for in advance using our online payment system SchoolMoney (Eduspot). Please contact us if there is a genuine reason, such as no access to a computer, that you are unable to pay in this way and we will try to help with an alternative.

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school will provide reminders and may grant a debt allowance of 5 meals. However, this debt must be cleared and the account topped up as soon as possible.

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 office will phone the parent to ask them to clear the outstanding balance or provide a packed lunch before lunchtime.

If the debt rises and payment is not received within 1 week of the final reminder letter, as a school we will be forced to refer the debt to the Trust Board.

By implementing this debt policy, we are aiming to help parents manage school dinner money better and to ensure that money given to the school for educational purposes is spent in the correct way.

If you believe that you 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. An online application form can be submitted via the Plymouth City Council website.

<https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/schoolseducationchildcareskillsandemployability/freeschoolmeals>

We will help you all we can with your application.

If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher
Mrs. E. Best

Appendix 2

Dinner Money Letter 1

Dear Parent/Carer,

Dinner Money Balances

We have checked the balance on your child's dinner money account today and unfortunately this now amounts to - £xxxxxxxxxx

As you will be aware, all school meals must be paid for in advance using our online payment system SchoolMoney (Eduspot), unless you have made alternative arrangements with us, we must therefore ask you to clear the outstanding balance and top up your child's account before any further meals are taken.

If your child orders a further meal we will unfortunately have no choice but to telephone to ask you to provide a packed lunch. We do not like doing this as it causes embarrassment to us both and we would therefore ask that you clear the account so that this can be avoided.

If you believe you may qualify for Free School Meals, please complete the online form available on the Plymouth City Council website.

<https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/schoolseducationchildcareskillsandemployability/freeschoolmeals>

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.

We look forward to receiving your payment, however if you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher
Mrs. E. Best

Dinner Money letter 2

Dear Parent/Carer,

Dinner Money Balances

We have checked the balance on your child's dinner money account today and unfortunately this now amounts to - £xxxxxxxxxx

As stated in Oreston Community Academy School Meals Debt Recovery Policy, all school meals must be paid for in advance using our online payment system SchoolMoney (Eduspot), unless you have made alternative arrangements with us, and we must therefore ask you to clear the outstanding balance within the next 7 days and top up your child's account before any further meals are taken.

If your child orders a further meal we will unfortunately have no choice but to telephone to ask you to provide a packed lunch. We do not like doing this as it causes embarrassment to us both and we would therefore ask that you clear the account so that this can be avoided.

If payment is not received within 7 days we will unfortunately have to refer the debt to the Trust Board. We must implement our policy as we have to ensure that the money given to the school for educational purposes is spent in the correct way.

If you believe you may qualify for Free School Meals, please complete please complete the online form available on the Plymouth City Council website.

<https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/schoolseducationchildcareskillsandemployability/freeschoolmeals>

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.

We look forward to receiving your payment, however if you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher
Mrs. E. Best