



Long Knowle Primary School

School Meals Debt 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.

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 any unpaid meals.

The governors at Long Knowle Primary School feel that a system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach and therefore introduced a 'No Debt' policy from April 2016. We understand that this may seem a very hard stance as there has in the past been a 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 entitlement. This policy brings us into line with other schools within the Local Authority.

If parents/carers believe that they may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals they should contact the office for more details. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. The school will help all we can with your application. All non FSM meals must be paid for before the meals are taken – usually on the Monday of the week ahead. Our new online dinner money system highlights debt immediately so keeping track effectively is now possible.

School lunches must be paid for in advance using Parent Pay. If for some reason PP is not accessible, then cash/cheque should be sent in. We will then help to ensure access to Parent Pay.

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of one meal. However this debt must be paid next day and future meals must be paid in advance before any meal is provided.

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 come to make a payment on Parent Pay or to provide sandwiches before lunch time.

Parents will be asked to indicate at the end of each term whether they want their child to have a school meal provided for the following term.

Parents should be able to relate to the situation that they cannot take their child to a restaurant e.g. McDonalds and expect them to be given food without paying. A small minority of parents in the school have expected food to be provided for their children without paying for it in advance and in some cases have run up significant arrears.

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

- A letter to parents who opt for their child to have a school meal
- Reminders in the school's newsletter
- School Information Pack for new parents
- 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.

Parents will be made aware of the policy when their child joins the school.

Key Information

1. All parents are to be made aware of the debt policy when their child joins the school.
2. All school lunches must be paid for in advance
3. All children eligible to pay for meals should pay the cost at the start of each week.
4. No child who is **not** eligible for FSM should be sent to school without having paid for a week's meals at the start of each week and expect to be given a meal
5. Parents who don't want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch.

Debt policy implementation – from April 2016

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' text

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 (usually but not exclusively the HT/DHT/AHT) will phone the parent to ask them to either bring the money into school or to bring sandwiches in before lunchtime

Level 3

Indicator: The parent 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 3: send strong debt letter

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: bring in outside agencies

Possibility of contact with small claims court, social services

We hope that by implementing this debt policy we are able to help parents manage school dinner money effectively and at the same time ensure that all the money meant for children's learning is available for that purpose.

Governors are grateful to parents/carers for their understanding and cooperation with the policy.

Policy Review

This policy was discussed and agreed by senior staff and administration staff in March 2016.

It was discussed and adopted by Governors on the Finance Committee on 15.3.16 and was ratified by Full Governing Body in Summer 2016.

It was reviewed in September 2018.

Reviewed October 2021

The policy was written by Ms K. Elliot.

It will be reviewed in Autumn 2022.

