



Osborne
Co-operative Academy Trust

Self-help
Self-responsibility
Equity
Equality
Democracy
Solidarity

School Meals Debt Recovery

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Author/Reviewer	Date Created	Version	Notes
K. Draper	September 2020	2.0	

Osborne Co-operative Academy Trust

Osborne Co-operative Academy Trust is a multi-academy trust (MAT) incorporated around the principles and values of the international co-operative movement. These are Equality, Equity, Democracy, Self-help, Self-Responsibility and Solidarity, along with the ethical values of openness, honesty, social responsibility and caring for others. These values and principles underpin all our actions.

School Meals Debt Recovery Policy

This policy has been written to help schools in Osborne Co-operative Academy Trust to adopt a consistent approach to debt. It provides clarity and consistency in managing debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

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.

Parents can easily relate to the situation that they cannot take their child to a restaurant and expect them to be given food without paying, yet a minority of parents expect free food in school. The Free School Meals system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals. Applying for Free School Meals is straight forward and parents can apply online, assuming eligibility is authorised the child can take a free school meal the following school day.

The system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach. It may seem a very hard stance in a school where there is a culture of debt tolerance. Although this will be tough to implement it will become easy to maintain once parents realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for FSM entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for. Your online payment system highlights debt immediately so keeping track will be simple.

Establishing a debt policy

Schools should first discuss this policy with staff and agree its debt policy with governors. The processes detailed below and in appendix 2 and 3 should be understood and implemented by staff. Once governors have agreed the policy, schools should make parents aware of this policy by including it in one or more of the following:

- A letter 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. The policy is attached as Appendix 1.

Debt policy implementation

Key Information

1. All parents are provided with a copy of the debt policy when their child joins the school.
2. All school lunches must be paid for in advance
3. No child should be sent to school with no money in their account and expect to be given a meal
4. Parents who don't want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch or arrange to take them home for lunch

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 debt reminder Appendix 2

This letter is likely to be already set up for you to use in your online payment system. Send it immediately the child's account goes into debt.

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

Telephone the parent to ask them to either bring money or pay online or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime or arrange to take their child home at 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 Appendix 3

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

Recovery of any debt payable by parents are recoverable as a civil debt. Schools may decide to ask the Trust to chase any debt through licenced debt recovery organisations and the courts.

Schools may also decide to inform Social Services of their concerns that parents are not providing a meal for their child at lunch time

APPENDIX 1

School Meals Debt Policy for Parents

As from September 2020 Little Thurrock Primary School has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy relating to the school meal service.

If debts are incurred, 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 debts incurred by parents. Every parent will agree that this is unacceptable and we request that all parents give this policy their full support.

No parent would take their child to a restaurant and expect them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school. If parents believe that their children may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals please contact Education Awards and Benefits, Thurrock Council at awards.thurrock.gov.uk, or alternatively visit www.thurrock.gov.uk/school-meals/free-school-meals. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. Help is available with your application either at the school office or by contacting Thurrock Council.

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

- Online using (ParentPay/SchoolComms/SIMS Agora) **THIS IS OUR PREFERRED METHOD**
- Send cash or cheque in a marked envelop

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, 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 advanced before any meal is provided. We will support parents by contacting them immediately if their account falls into debt.

If the debt is not cleared, parents must either provide a packed lunch or take the child home for lunch. In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the head teacher will phone the parent to ask them to come to school with the money or ask them to pay online immediately. Otherwise they must provide sandwiches before lunch time or arrange to take their child home for lunch.

If payment of the debt is not received by the next day, the Headteacher reserves the right to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt. Social services may also be informed that these parents are not carrying out the responsibility of care by not providing food for their children at lunchtime.

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

APPENDIX 2

Print on school letterhead

Parent or carer of Name

Address

Date

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child (Name)

Class: (Class)

As at (date) your account is showing a debt of (**£- value**)

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately. Once the debt is cleared please ensure the account is always in credit.

You have two ways to pay:

1. In the secure online payment system, using the login already provided, go to (web address) NB THIS IS OUR PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD

Your username and password are:

Username: xxxxxx Password: yyyyyyy

2. Send in money to school in a marked envelope

No matter how you pay you can check the account balance anytime by logging into your account at (web address). You can see what meals have been taken and when.

The cost of a school meal is £XX per day - £XX per week.

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

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

APPENDIX 3

Print on school letterhead

Parent or carer of Name
Address

Date

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child (name) Class: (class) despite a previous written reminder and a telephone call

As at (date) your account is showing a debt of (**£-value**)

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately.

You have two ways to pay:

1. In the secure online payment system ParentPay, using the login already provided, go to (web address) NB THIS IS OUR PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD

Your username and password are:

Username: xxxxxx Password: yyyyyyy

2. Send in money to school in a marked envelop

No matter how you pay you can check the account balance anytime by logging into your account at (web address). You can see what meals have been taken and when.

The cost of a school meal is £XX per day - £XX per week.

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 and I am afraid that if the debt is not cleared by the end of this week it will not be possible to provide your child with a school meal. You will need to make your own arrangements for your child's lunch.

The school reserves the right to begin legal proceeding to recover the debt and to inform social services of our concerns that you are not providing a meal for your child at lunch time.

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

Yours sincerely

Headteacher