



## St Peter's Church of England Primary School School Meals Debt Policy

The Governing Body of St Peter's Church of England Primary School adopted this policy on _____
Signed: _____ (Chair of Governors)
Signed: _____ (Head Teacher)
Review every 2 years

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.

Occasionally a decision will have to be made about 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.

For the purpose of this policy and for readability we use the term parent to mean parent or guardian.

The Free School Meals system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals. If a parent is suffering temporary financial problems it is important that they inform the school immediately in case the school may be able to help. All conversations will be treated with strict confidentiality.

It is very time consuming and highly embarrassing for all concerned when office staff have to chase parents for money. Occasionally it can also have a negative effect on our relationships with families. This policy seeks to avoid this.

The Governors at St Peter's CoE Primary School feel that a system that works best is a 'no debt' approach. We have a duty of care to our parents to restrict the opportunity to get into debt. We also have a duty of care for the wellbeing of the children in our school. In the past there has been a culture of debt tolerance and this change may be tough to implement, however, it will become easy to maintain once parents realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for Free School Meal or Universal Free School Meal entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for. Our ParentPay payment system highlights debt immediately so keeping track will be easy.

We understand there are times when parents may forget to top up their School Dinner ParentPay account, and therefore there will be a process of reminder message to ensure the school is reimbursed for the meal given on that day.

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

- A letter to parents

- Reminders in the school's newsletter
- The school prospectus
- 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.

All parents will be provided with a copy of the policy when their child joins the school.

The letter to parents is attached as Appendix 1.

### ***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 hot school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch

### ***Debt policy implementation***

#### **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:

- The child will be fed.
- The parent will be sent a 'Gentle debt reminder' message via ParentPay—Appendix 2

#### **Level 2**

Indicator: A child comes to school again without the debt being paid

- 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:

- The child will be fed.
- The parent will be sent a 'Debt reminder' message via Class Dojo - Appendix 3

### **Level 3**

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 3:

- Someone will phone the parent to ask them to either credit their ParentPay account or bring sandwiches in before lunchtime
- The child will not be fed a hot school dinner unless money is received before lunchtime.

### **Level 4**

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 4: send strong debt letter

- The Head Teacher will send a final letter - Appendix 4

### **Level 5**

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 5: bring in outside agencies**

- Local Authority to advise, potentially report to social services.

The school reserves the right to withdraw the option of a hot school lunch to any parties who reach Level 5.

Due to the administrative time it takes to check for negative balances, request outstanding payments from parents and then monitor for receipt of funds, the school also reserve the right to withdraw the option of a hot school lunch to any parties who persistently reach Level 2 (Persistent = 6 or more times in any term.)

Bespoke correspondence/notice will be given – Appendix 5 (Example)

## Appendix 1

Dear Parents / Carers

### School Meals Policy

St Peter's CoE Primary School have a NO DEBT policy relating to school meals.

The reason for this is because 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. I am sure everybody will agree that this is unacceptable and we hope that all parents give this policy their full support. As we all know nobody takes their child to McDonalds and expects them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school.

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. We will help you all we can with your application.

If you are suffering temporary financial problems it is important that you contact the school immediately in case the school may be able to help.

School lunches must be paid for in advance using the method of payment outlined below:

- Online via our ParentPay app.

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of up to two meals. However, this debt must be paid by day 3 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 school with the money or provide sandwiches before lunch time.

If payment of the debt is not received by the next day, the school may also inform Social Services of failures in parents' responsibility to provide food for children. The Head Teacher also reserves the right to inform the Chair of the Governors and the schools Full Governing Body who in extreme cases may decide to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt.

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 the money that is for children's learning is available.

If you have any concerns please don't hesitate in contacting me.

Yours sincerely

Mr P Bolstridge  
Head Teacher

## **Appendix 2**

### Text Message 1

Your child had a dinner today and unfortunately there were insufficient funds in your account. Please top-up ParentPay. Thank you.

## **Appendix 3**

### Text Message 2

Dinner money still owed £X, please top up ParentPay. No school meals will be provided until this is paid, please provide your child with packed lunches.

## Appendix 4

Parent or carer of (pupil name)

Address 1

Address 2

Address 3

Address 4

Date

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

As at xx/xx/xxxx your account is showing a debt of **£-x.xx**

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

Please pay using ParentPay, the secure online payment system, using the login already provided.

You can check the account balance anytime by logging into your ParentPay account. You can see what meals have been taken and when. If you need support with doing this please contact the school office.

The cost of a school meal is £2.55 per day - £12.75 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 until the debt is cleared 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 inform social services of our concerns that you are not providing a meal for your child at lunch time and to begin legal proceedings to recover the debt.

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

Yours sincerely

Mr P Bolstridge  
Head Teacher

## Appendix 5

(Example – will alter according to correspondence received etc.)

I am disappointed to note that we again have a debit balance on your dinner money account despite sending numerous emails detailing our terms and conditions.

We do not have the administrative hours to monitor your account daily, yet you repeatedly fail to make payment in good time resulting in admin time being taken up in asking you to make payment. We have been clear that this cannot continue, yet your pattern of late payment hasn't changed.

Regrettably, we therefore have no choice but to block your account.

We will provide (child/rens name/s) with a hot meal today, but from tomorrow you must provide a packed lunch. I reiterate that it is YOUR responsibility to provide a meal for (child/rens name).

We will review this position at October/February/May half term, but should you wish to discuss this further, please don't hesitate to make contact.