



School Meal Provision Debt Management Policy

Policy due to be reviewed: September 2024

Committee Responsible for Policy: Finance Committee

School Meal Provision Debt Management Policy

Introduction

The Governing Body is responsible for ensuring that school meals provisions are accessible to all children and that procedures are in place for the recovery of any outstanding debt.

Hillcrest School has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy to the school meal service.

The School Meals Debt Recovery Policy has been adopted to ensure that there is a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by Parent/Carer whose child/ren take school dinners. The school budget will be directly affected by any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered, thereby directly affecting all children in school. We are confident that every Parent/Carer's will agree that this is unacceptable, and we request that all Parent/Carer's give this policy their full support.

Provision of School meals

The Schools Meals Service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for by someone. Free School Meals are available for Parent/Carer's who meet certain criteria including the receipt of state benefits. Anyone who may qualify for Free School Meals should contact the school office for further information. Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that all qualifying Parent/Carer's take up their child's entitlement so that they can receive a school meal each day.

If a child's entitlement to free school meals expires or the Parent/Carer's personal circumstances change, the Parent/Carer must provide a packed lunch or add money onto their ParentMail account so the student may purchase food at the school canteen.

Cost of School Meals

School meals are available at lunchtime to children at a cost of £2.53 per day or at no cost to those in receipt of Free School Meals entitlement. There are meal deals available for £2.53 that include a hot meal or sandwich, a drink and a fruit pot or snack. Any revision to the school meal prices will be notified to Parent/Carer the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

If students wish to purchase food/drinks/snacks at the school canteen during breakfast and mid-morning breaks Parent/Carer's should ensure that they have added money to their child's ID card by making payment via ParentMail (see below for further information on how to do this).

Payment for school meals, purchasing drinks and snacks at the school canteen

A Parent/Carer can add money onto their child's account and pay by using ParentMail via the schools secure online payment system (www.Parentmail.co.uk). Once a Parent/Carer has paid on ParentMail, the money is then credited to their child's swipe ID card, the student can then go into the school canteen and purchase lunch, snacks and drinks.

If Parent/Carer are not yet registered for ParentMail they should contact the school on 0121 464 3172 and the school will send an activation message via text or email to the Parent/Carer. Follow the instruction within the message to register. Please note, the activation message is only valid for 24 hours, after which time you will need to request a new activation message again.

Parent/Carer can check the account balance at any time by logging into your ParentMail account and selecting "accounts". This current balance will then be displayed underneath your child's name on the right. Click "Dinner Top-up" to add funds, then select the shopping basket beneath and follow the payment prompts on screen.

Management of School Meal Debts

It is the Parent/Carer responsibility to track any debts occurring and payment should be made immediately. If there are any disputes over meals taken Parent/Carer must contact the school office.

The procedure for recovering student dinner money debts, is as follows:

- 1st reminder letter (appendix 1) will be sent in the post or via ParentMail detailing how much is owed. Payment must be made within 7 working days.
- 2nd reminder letter (appendix 2) will be sent in the post or via ParentMail detailing how much is owed. Payment must be made within 7 working days. This letter will also inform the Parent/Carer that if the debt is not cleared, the matter will be referred to the next stage.
- 3rd and final letter (appendix 3) will be sent in the post or via ParentMail detailing how much is owed and the consequences of non-payment.
- Meeting invitation. If the matter remains unresolved the Parent/Carer will be invited to attend a meeting in school to discuss the matter. At this point the school may consider legal proceedings to pursue the outstanding school meal debt if necessary.

Reminders may also be sent via text message/email via ParentMail and if required by telephone.

The school will work closely with Parent/Carer to produce a formal payment plan to help resolve the situation if requested by the Parent/Carer. However, where no attempt is made to clear the debt it will follow the procedure of the school's Debt Management Policy.

In exceptional circumstances if a student has no money on their account the school may allow a meal to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary situation. e.g. money has not been added to their ParentMail account but will be credited later, temporary hardship etc. However, details should be recorded in writing and a record maintained and monitored. Parent/Carer should ensure payment is made via ParentMail as soon as possible.

If the school is unable to recover any dinner money arrears from a Parent/Carer, the school will not provide any further food/drinks/snacks for the student in the school canteen and the Parent/Carer must send the student into school with a packed lunch.

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts

Details of any outstanding dinner debt money and the current position regarding debt will be provided to the Governors of the Finance Committee. The aim of the School's Meal Provision Policy is to minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up. The school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal debts if necessary.

Any outstanding debts written-off, must be approved by the Governing Body/Finance Committee following submission of details of the debt together with reasons for no further action being taken in line with procedures outlined within the Financial Management Handbook.

Appendix 1

<date/>

Dear Parent/Carer of <childforename> <childsurname> Class: <class>

RE: 1st Reminder Letter

This is a reminder that, according to our records, you have arrears on your child's dinner money account.

Our records show that at <date/> your debt is <balance/>.

In order for your child to continue to receive school meals at lunchtime and to be able to purchase snacks and drinks at breakfast and/or mid-morning breaks, it is important to keep your account in credit at all times.

Please arrange for the amount stated above to be paid within 7 days.

In the meantime, you will need to provide your child with a packed lunch until your account has been settled and your child will not be able to purchase snacks, drinks or lunch in the school canteen until the account is in credit again.

You can pay using ParentMail (www.Parentmail.co.uk) our secure online payment system, by selecting the 'Dinner Top Up' option.

If you have not yet registered for ParentMail please contact the school on 0121 464 3172 and we will send you an activation message via text or email. You just need to follow the instruction in the message to register (the activation message will only be available for 24 hours)

Please note that school meals should be paid for in advance (£2.53 per day, or £12.65 per week) and that it is important to keep your child's account in credit at all times.

You can check your account balance at any time by logging into your ParentMail account. If you think your child may be entitled to receive Free School Meals, please contact the school office.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school on 0121 464 3172 and we will be happy to assist you.

Yours sincerely

Mrs S Rudge
Finance Manager
Hillcrest School

Appendix 2

<date/>

Dear Parent/Carer of <childforename> <childsurname/> Class: <class/>

RE: 2nd Reminder Letter

This is a reminder that, according to our records, you have arrears on your child's dinner money account.

Our records show that at <date/> your debt is <balance/>.

Your debt has already been outstanding for more than 7 days. We would therefore ask you to make immediate payment. If you are unable to do so, please provide your child with packed lunches until your account has been settled. Your child will not be able to purchase snacks, drinks or lunch in the school canteen until the account is in credit again.

If this continues to be unpaid, the school office will contact you to discuss any queries and arrange a payment schedule.

You can pay using ParentMail (www.Parentmail.co.uk) our secure online payment system, by selecting the 'Dinner Top Up' option.

If you have not yet registered for ParentMail please contact the school on 0121 464 3172 and we will send you an activation message via text or email. You just need to follow the instruction in the message to register (the activation message will only be available for 24 hours)

Please note that school meals should be paid for in advance (£2.53 per day, or £12.65 per week) and that it is important to keep your child's account in credit at all times.

You can check your account balance at any time by logging into your ParentMail account. If you think your child may be entitled to receive Free School Meals, please contact the school office.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school on 0121 464 3172 and we will be happy to assist you.

Yours sincerely

Mrs S Rudge
Finance Manager
Hillcrest School

Appendix 3

<date/>

Dear Parent/Carer of <childforename> <childsurname/> Class: <class/>

According to our records your child's dinner money account remains in arrears, we have sent you 2 reminders letters regarding the arrears but to date we have still not received payment.

Our records show that at <date/> your debt is <balance/>.

As your debt remains outstanding we ask that you make payment by (enter date).

If payment is not received by this date the school will unfortunately need to consider starting legal proceedings and/or referring the matter to a debt collection agency to recover the monies owed. This is not something the school wish to proceed with, and if payment is made immediately then this will not be necessary.

Your child will not be able to purchase food in the school canteen until the account is in credit. Please ensure you send them into school with a packed lunch.

Please contact the school if you wish to discuss a payment plan to assist in repaying the monies owed.

You can pay using ParentMail (www.Parentmail.co.uk) our secure online payment system, by selecting the 'Dinner Top Up' option.

If you have not yet registered for ParentMail please contact the school on 0121 464 3172 and we will send you an activation message via text or email. You just need to follow the instruction in the message to register (the activation message will only be available for 24 hours)

Please note that school meals should be paid for in advance (£2.53 per day, or £12.65 per week) and that it is important to keep your child's account in credit at all times.

You can check your account balance at any time by logging into your ParentMail account. If you think your child may be entitled to receive Free School Meals, please contact the school office.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school on 0121 464 3172 and we will be happy to assist you.

Yours sincerely

Mrs S Johnson
Strategic Business Manager
Hillcrest School