



STOCKSBRIDGE JUNIOR SCHOOL

SCHOOL MEALS DEBT RECOVERY POLICY

Policy Statement

Stocksbridge Junior School Debt Recovery Policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners. As the Local Authority is no longer accountable for the administration of dinner money debt the responsibility now falls on the school to pursue instances of non-payment. As a result, the school budget will have to directly fund any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered thereby directly affecting the amount of money that is available to provide education to all pupils.

The Governors feel that a system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach.

The Schools Meals Service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for. It is very time consuming for school to continuously chase parents for money. It is also highly embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative effect on relationships with families. The free school meal system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals.

Parents who meet certain criteria may qualify for Free School Meals. Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that all parents/carers who qualify take up their child's entitlement so that they can receive a School meal each day. Information on the entitlement to free school meals and an application form can be found on the Sheffield City Council Website: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/education/information-for-parentscarers/at-school/school-meals/free-school-meals>. If you think you may be entitled to statutory Free School Meals, please contact the school office who will assist you with your application if required.

If a child's entitlement to free school meals expires or the parents/carers personal circumstances change the parent/carer must provide a packed lunch or send payment in advance for a school dinner.

Payment for School Meals

School wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents /carers to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals, which can then be difficult to clear.

Payment for school meals must be made in advance using the online payment system ParentMail at www.parentmail.co.uk. When parents /carers log onto ParentMail they can

easily see the balance of their account. ParentMail provides a facility free of charge, which parents / carers can subscribe to, which will remind you if your balance becomes low and we would encourage you to use this facility.

Parents /carers should contact the school if there is a genuine reason why they are unable to pay online e.g. no access to a computer and the school will help with an alternative payment method.

Management of School Meal Debts

If a child arrives at school without a packed lunch or payment, or if a child's entitlement to free school dinners has ceased, the School will contact the parent/carer in the first instance to establish if alternative arrangements have been made.

If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a text message detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting immediate payment.

Where a child continues to take unpaid meals, the School may try to establish if the child is entitled to free school meals, or if the parent/carer is experiencing hardship which affects their ability to pay. Under these circumstances the parent/carer should be invited to apply for free school meals or speak confidentially to the Head Teacher.

If any debt exceeds £20, and/or action proves unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, the parent /carer must provide a packed lunch until debts are cleared. In a case when a debt payment is not received and a packed lunch is not provided, the school will provide your child with a school lunch, to ensure that they are fed, **for this day only**. If the debt is still not repaid and a packed lunch not provided, you will be asked to come into school to meet with a member of the Senior Leadership Team. If such circumstances persist, school will inform the Multi-agency Team as failure to provide a child's lunch will be regarded as a Safeguarding issue.

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts

The Head Teacher may provide Governors with details of any outstanding dinner money debt and the current position with regard to such debt. The aim of the School's dinner money policy is to minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up. The School may refer any unpaid debts to SCC debt collection service and reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal debts and inform the local authority that a child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

All Write-offs of outstanding debt must be approved by the Governing Body/Finance Committee following submission of details of the debt by the Head Teacher together with reasons for no further action being taken.

This policy has been agreed and adopted by the governing body:

Date: December 2019

Headteacher's signature: _____

Chair of Governor's signature: _____

Date of next review: January 2021