

**DEBT POLICY**

**1. Background**

The Governing Body has a responsibility for ensuring that appropriate procedures are in operation to enable the School to receive all income to which it is entitled.

The emergence of cashless payment systems in schools, it will make it more transparent when parents have not paid their accounts for school meals, trips, etc. promptly. For this reason it is important that schools ensure they have a policy for dealing with any debts, especially in relation to school meals.

**2. Establishing a debt policy**

The Governing Body has discussed the policy with staff and then agreed the debt policy for the school. The school has made parents aware of the policy through

- A letter to parents
- The school's newsletter
- The school brochure
- The school website

This will be reviewed annually..

Appendix 1 provides a model letter which could be used to inform parents of the School's School Meals Debt policy.

**School Meals Debt Policy for Parents**

Firs Farm School has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy relating to the provision of school meal. This will in effect mean all money for school meals will need to be paid in advance. There is one days allowance allowed per child.

If debts are incurred, then the School will need to consider how the debt can be managed which may mean money which should be spent on your child(ren)'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.

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

- Credit/Debit Cards Online using ParentPay
- Pay Point Cards (Ask in the office about PayPoint payments)

If parents believe that their children may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals then please contact the office for further information. The allowance for Free School Meal is a statutory entitlement and should be claimed if your child qualifies. In order to qualify, you will be required to complete an application form and provide any evidence which may be requested. Free school meal entitlement will only apply from the date the evidence has been received and the application has been approved. It can not be backdated. The School will support parents with the application.

## **Firs Farm Primary School**

Children will not be provided with a school lunch unless it is paid for in advance or the child is entitled to a free school meal.

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of 1 meal. However this debt must be paid immediately using the above payment method together with a sum for future meals otherwise the School will be unable to provide further meals.

If there are insufficient funds on a child's account, then parents will be required to provide a packed lunch for their child. If there is insufficient credit on a child's account and a packed lunch has not been provided, the School will contact the parent to ask them what arrangements they have made to provide their child with food.

If payment of the debt is not received within five days, the School reserves the right to begin debt management proceedings against parents to recover the debt. The LA Children's Services may also be informed that the 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.

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

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

### **STEPS:**

1. Day 1 – if the account has gone into debt then a full school meal will be provided and a text will be sent notifying families that unless the account is topped up their child will not receive a full school meal the next day.
2. Day 2 - If the account is not credited the next day then the child will not receive a full school meal and the family will be notified that their child has had a lighter lunch.
3. Day 3 - If the account is still not in credit the family will be contacted requesting a packed lunch be provided.
4. Day 4 - If the account is still not in credit then a final letter will be sent stating the amount in debt and informing families that debt recovery proceedings will begin through the Local Authority.

**DEBT RECOVERY POLICY**

1. The School will actively pursue the collection of monies owed to it.  
If the student is not an adult, the parents of the student are jointly and severally liable for the charge.
2. The (Office Manager/School Business Manager/Bursar) is required to ensure that:
  - all invoices outstanding are accurately recorded and maintained.
  - there is documentary evidence of all the steps undertaken by the school to recover the debt. This includes recording the dates that invoices and statements were distributed, and/or phone calls and letters that have been sent to debtors.
  - for all outstanding debts, a final statement (stamped final notice) is issued to all persons liable for the charge. This statement must state “further action will be taken if this account remains outstanding after a period of no less than *Schools need to consider the maximum amount a school meals account can be in debt and then equate this to the days.*”
3. The Governing Body must:
  - consider the arrangements for debt recovery
  - recommend the maximum level of debt which any family would be able to incur.
  - approve the school undertaking legal action.
  - include in the minutes of the Governing Body their approval to pursue any outstanding debt.
  - ensure the anonymity of the families involved is preserved at all times.
4. Pursuance of Debt  
The School should:
  - not pass onto the debtor an costs incurred in pursuing the outstanding debt
  - give the debtor appropriate notification and time to pay the outstanding charge
  - send the debtor as a minimum a final statement, which states that this is the final notice and that further action will be taken.
5. Waiving of Debt  
  
The Headteacher can waive or reduce the debt, where it is believed the debtor is experiencing financial hardship.  
  
A debt may be written off by resolution of the Governing Body on the recommendation of the Headteacher or delegate.  
  
A recommendation to write off a debt can be made when all reasonable avenues to recover the debt have been exhausted, and where it is not cost effective to pursue the debt through legal action.
6. Any action related to an outstanding debt or the waiving / reducing of a debt should be dealt with confidentially between the debtor and the Headteacher.