



Mundella Primary School Policies

School Meals Debt Recovery Policy

Date Created/Updated: September 2023

Created by: Headteacher, Business Manager

Date to be Reviewed: September 2024

Policy Statement

The Mundella Primary School Debt Recovery Policy has been adopted to ensure that there is 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, and unfortunately, 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 agree 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.

Currently pupils in Foundation, Year 1 and Year 2 are able to have Universal Infant Free School Meals. Parents of pupils in Year 3, Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6 will have to pay for any school meals that their child has unless they are eligible and apply for Income Based Free School Meals.

Parents who meet certain criteria may qualify for Income Based Free School Meals. Income Based 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/home/schools-childcare/school-meals>

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

Payment for School meals, where possible, should be made in advance. Payment can be made using our online payment system, ParentPay, or by using a PayPoint barcode. When parents/carers log onto ParentPay they can easily see the balance of their account. The school office no longer accepts payments by cash or cheque. ParentPay provides a facility which you can subscribe to which will remind you if your balance becomes low. We encourage you to use this facility.

Management of School Meal Debts

If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, an email will be sent to the parent/carer requesting immediate payment. If immediate action is not taken and the debt exceeds the equivalent of

5 meals, parents will be asked to provide a packed lunch for their child until the debt is completely cleared and our Safeguarding Team may be informed. The parents/carers will receive a formal letter explaining that the School is not obliged to provide a school dinner where payment is not forthcoming or where authorisation for free school dinners has not been received.

Where a child takes 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 Income Based Free School Meals and can speak confidentially to the Head Teacher, Learning Mentor or School Business Manager.

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 and incurring costly referral to the School's solicitors. The School 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.