

ST JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL SCHOOL MEALS DEBT POLICY – INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy relating to the school meal service, currently provided by the company Edward and Wards.

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 debts incurred by parents. Every parent will agree that this is unacceptable and we request that all parents give this policy their full support.

If parents believe that their children may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals, please request a Wandsworth Council Application Form – Pupil Premium and Free School Meals from the School Office. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. Help is available with your application at the school office, if needed.

Parent/s must pay in advance for their child's school lunch using any of the methods of payment outlined below:

- Online parent payment system - ParentMail. THIS IS OUR PREFERRED METHOD.
- OR
- Request a PayPoint Barcode from the School Office for cash payments.

Children will not be provided with a school lunch unless it is paid for, except those that are entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) or Universal Free School Meals (UFSM). For the academic Year 2024-2025 this is all classes from Reception – Year 6.

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of £20.00. However, this debt must be paid within 14 days and future meals must be paid in advanced before any meal is provided.

If the debt is not cleared, parents must either provide a packed lunch or take the child home for lunch. In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the Headteacher will ask the school office to phone the parent to ask them to come to school with the money or ask them to pay online immediately. Otherwise they must provide sandwiches before lunch time or arrange to take their child home for lunch.

If payment of the debt is not received within 28 days, the Headteacher reserves the right 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 money that is for children's learning is available for that purpose. If you have any concerns, please don't hesitate in contacting the school.

St Joseph's Catholic Primary school will ensure that parents/carers are aware of this policy in the following ways:

- A letter to parents/carers via ParentMail
- The school Newsletter
- The school Website

This will ensure that all parents/carers receive the same message in a consistent way. This should be communicated at least once each year, more often when it is first introduced. All parents should be provided with a copy of the policy when their child first joins the school.

- All parents/carers are provided with a copy of the debt policy when their child joins the school.
- All school lunches must be paid for in advance

Level 1

Indicator: A child's record shows a debt

Check 1 Is this a FSM child, are dates correct?

Check 2 Is there a possibility that payments have not been recorded correctly?

Check 3 Does this parent/carer normally pay on time, is this just a one off?

Action 1: send a 'Gentle debt reminder' Appendix A

Appendix A – Sent after 14 days of non-payment of school dinners.

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 recorded correctly?

Check 3 Has this parent/carer made contact?

Action 2: Personal contact

Someone will phone the parent/carer to ask them to make payment and inform them that their child will need to be on packed lunch until the debt is paid.

Level 3

Indicator: The parent/carer 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 recorded correctly?

Check 3 Has this parent made contact?

Action 3: send strong debt letter Appendix B

Appendix B – Sent after Letter 1 and no longer than 28 days after non-payment of school dinners.

Level 4

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 recorded?

Check 3 Has this parent made contact?

Action 4: Refer outstanding debt to the school Governors

Appendix C Letters 1-3 - Send payment plan letters Appendix C

School Clubs -Lunchtime, Before -school and After-school

Children may only attend if the fees have been paid in advance. Schools clubs are paid on either a half termly or termly basis and parents/carers are informed via ParentMail of the clubs that are available and the cost per session. Places are secured as long as payment has been received for the full period and received in advance with consent. If the club is cancelled for an unforeseen reason (e.g. Staff absence or other matters outside school control) a refund for the lost session(s) will be made. The school and Governing Body acknowledge that, on occasion, families have financial difficulties and in these proven circumstances, the school will work hard with the family to agree a solution which is not to the detriment of the child. If a child does not attend a club for whatever reason no refunds will be given.

Appendix A

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Parent or carer of *(child's name)*

(Date)

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child *(name)* in *(class)*.
As at *(date)* your account is showing a debt of (£....) Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately. Once the debt is cleared please ensure the account is always in credit.

You have 2 ways to pay:

1. Online parent payment system - ParentMail. THIS IS OUR PREFERRED METHOD.
- OR
2. Request a PayPoint Barcode from the School Office for cash payments.

No matter how you pay you can check your account balance at anytime by logging into your ParentMail account. You can see what meals have been taken and when. The cost of a school meal is £2.70 per day - £13.50 per week.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or ParentMail login/access problems, please contact the school office immediately.

Yours sincerely

Miss Cashier
Headteacher

Appendix B

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Parent or carer of *(child's name)*

(Date)

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child *(name)* in *(class)* **despite a previous written reminder and a telephone call**. As at *(date)* your account is showing a debt of (£....) Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately. Once the debt is cleared please ensure the account is always in credit.

You have 2 ways to pay:

1. Online parent payment system - ParentMail. THIS IS OUR PREFERRED METHOD.
- OR
2. Request a PayPoint Barcode from the School Office for cash payments.

No matter how you pay you can check your account balance at anytime by logging into your Parentmail account. You can see what meals have been taken and when. The cost of a school meal from 1 April 2023 is £2.70 per day - £13.50 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 if the debt is not cleared by the end of this week 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 begin legal proceeding to recover the debt. If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or ParentMail login/access problems, please contact the school office immediately.

Yours sincerely

Miss Cashier
Headteacher

APPENDIX C - Letter 1

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Parent or carer of *(child's name)*

(Date)

I am writing to advise you that there is an outstanding balance of (£...) on *(child's name)* dinner money account.

It is the policy of St Joseph's Catholic Primary school, that the school does not pay for dinners on behalf of the children. As a result of this, I need to advise you that the school will be unable to provide a hot meal for *(child's name)* until this debt is cleared.

A weekly payment plan to pay the debt would be acceptable, i.e. £x per week, and I would appreciate your co-operation in setting this plan up.

Please ensure *(child's name)* is provided with a packed lunch as of *(date)* until the debt is cleared and then school dinners can re-commence. Thank you for your assistance.

If you wish to discuss this further, then please do not hesitate to contact me. I enclose a copy of the School's Meals Debt Policy for your information.

Yours sincerely,

Miss Cashier
Headteacher

APPENDIX C - Letter 2

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Parent or carer of *(child's name)*

(Date)

You will recall that I wrote to you a few days ago regarding the outstanding balance on *(child's name)* dinner money account to the value of (£...).

As you know, it is the policy of St Joseph's Catholic Primary school that the school does not pay for dinners on behalf of the children. We have not received any communication from you with regard to starting a weekly payment plan as suggested in my previous letter, and would request that you telephone the office to make an appointment to see me to discuss this further.

Thank you for your assistance. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

Miss Cashier
Headteacher

APPENDIX C - Letter 3

St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

Parent or carer of *(child's name)*

(Date)

We have not received any communication from you with regard to you making arrangements to recover the outstanding debt of (£...). In line with the School Meals Debt Policy, a copy of which was sent to you with a previous letter, I have no option but to refer this outstanding debt to the school Governing Board.

The School Governors will consider the situation and you will be contacted in due course over the action the school intends to take, which could include making a claim in the small claims court.

Yours sincerely,

Miss Cashier
Headteacher

POLICY REVIEW TERM: ANNUAL

Policy reviewed: March 2024

Next review: March 2025