



School Debt Policy

March 2023

Approved by Headteacher

Review Date: March 2025

Background

The Shears Green Junior School Debt Policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners. 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.

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 parents 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 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 can be made on KCC's website: <https://www.cloudforedu.org.uk/ofsm/kent/>

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.

Cost of School Meals

School meals are available to children at a cost of £2.50 per day or at no cost to those in receipt of Free School Meals entitlement. School meals must be paid for in advance and no later than 9am on the day in which a meal is required. Any revision to the school meal prices will be notified to parents/carers the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

Payment for School Meals

School dinners must be paid for in advance and no later than 9am on the day in which a meal is required. Payments can only be made via Arbor unless other arrangements have been made with the permission of the Head Teacher.

Management of School Meal Debts

To ensure that the School's budget is not adversely affected by the cost of School meal debt, the Governors consider the fairest system to all families is to pursue a 'Zero Tolerance' approach. Although this may seem harsh to some parents, it is important that the school budget is spent for the benefit of all our pupils and not a small number.

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 telephone/text the parent/carer in the first instance to establish if alternative arrangements have been made.

When a parent has failed to pay for a meal, the school may allow a meal to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary situation. e.g.tech issues, short term account issues , temporary hardship etc. however details should be recorded in writing and a record maintained and monitored.

If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, an email/text detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting payment directly to the school within 7 days. No meals will be provided during this time until the debt is cleared. Prompt action will be taken to address any debt issue at an early stage in order to prevent arrears amassing.

Where a child continues to require meals, the School must 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 in confidence to the Head Teacher.

When the debt exceeds one day for a child or family, a formal email must be sent to the parent/carer informing them to provide their child/children with a packed lunch to prevent further arrears. If the child/children is/are not provided with the requested packed lunch and the parent/carer cannot be contacted, the School will provide a sandwich and a drink only.

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts

At each meeting of the Governing Body/Finance Committee, the Head Teacher will 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. 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.