



## Highgate Primary Academy School Meals Debt Policy

This policy has been written to help schools to adopt a consistent approach to debt. It provides clarity and consistency in managing debt and will also help parents/carers clearly understand what is expected of them.

The vast majority of parents incur no debt and those who do settle it quickly. However, significant debt can be accrued by a single household if it is not addressed quickly. In the meantime, the costs have to be met through the school's main budget, which is unfair on all children. As such, the school operate a clear "No Debt" policy.

Parents can keep track of their child's account through MCAS.

The Free School Meals system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals. Applying for Free School Meals is straight forward, and parents apply online, assuming eligibility is authorised the child can take a free school meal the following school day. You can apply by visiting [www.barnsley.gov.uk/free-school-meals](http://www.barnsley.gov.uk/free-school-meals) or call 01226787787 option 3.

### **Implementation:**

- Parents are made aware of this policy electronically via e-mail.
- This policy is on the school website.
- All parents will be provided with a copy of the policy when their child joins the school.
- All school lunches must be paid for in advance.
- Parents should not expect that their child will be given a meal, unless parents are FSM entitled.
- Parents who don't want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch.
- The policy is attached.

**Level 1 Indicator: A child's account goes into debt**

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

Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 3 does this parent normally pay on time, is this just a one off?

**Action 1: weekly 'Gentle debt reminder' letter/email will be sent.**

**See Appendix 2**

**Level 2 Indicator: If debt is not cleared by following Monday.**

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

Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited? Check

3 has this parent made contact?

**Action 2: Personal contact - someone will phone the parent to ask them to either pay online or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime.**

**Level 3 Indicator: The parent 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 credited? Check

3 has this parent made contact?

**Action 3: Strong debt letter- debt is cleared/ agree and stick to debt recovery plan.**

**Appendix 3 The Principal will send a final letter, if debt is not cleared/debt recovery plan is not being adhered to.**

**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 credited? Check

3 has this parent made contact?

Check 4 has debt letter been sent?

Check 5 has a debt payment plan been agreed/and not adhered to?

**Action 4: Use outside agencies who will initiate further action/additional recovery cost will also be added.**

## **APPENDIX 1 Initial Letter**

Dear Parent/Carer

Following an increase in the amount of debt being owed to school following non-payment of school dinners, the school has decided to adopt a clear NO DEBT policy relating to the school meal service.

If you believe that your children may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals, please contact the school office on 01709 892160. This allowance is a statutory right, and it is important that you use it if you qualify. Help is available with your application from the school office.

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

- Online using MCAS THIS IS OUR PREFERRED METHOD
- Barcoded letter can be printed and paid via Paypoint.

If a parent/carer genuinely forgets to pay for a meal in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance during the first week of the debt. However, this debt must be paid by the weekend of the same week and future meals must be paid in advance before any meal is provided.

### **If the debt is not cleared**

Parents must provide a packed lunch for their child(ren).

It is not the responsibility of the school to provide a meal unless it has been paid for or your child is entitled to free school meals. It is the responsibility of the school to provide the service for this.

### **In a case when a debt payment is not received, nor a packed lunch provided.**

The school office will phone you to ask you to come to pay via MCAS or provide sandwiches before lunch time for your child.

### **If payment of the debt is not received by the next day**

The Principal reserves the right to inform the Trust/Chair of the Local Governing Body to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt.

It is not the responsibility of the school to provide a meal. It is the responsibility of parents/carers to provide a meal or the means to pay for a meal.

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. This will also free up time for the office and the leadership of the school to undertake more important matters than chasing debt from families.

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

Yours sincerely, Principal

**APPENDIX 2 – Letter/Notice 2**

Contact name  
Contact address.

Dear xxxxxxxxxxxx

Pupil: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx  
Class:xxxxxxx

I am writing to remind you that according to our records, you have arrears on your child’s dinner money account. In order for your child to continue to receive school lunches it is important to keep your account in credit. Please note that school dinners are now £2.50 per day, or £12.50 per week.

Our records show that for your child xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx  
Class: xxxxxx  
At xxxxxxx your debt is £xxxxxxx

Your username and password are:

User Name xxxxxxxx Password xxxxxxxx

You can check your account balance anytime by logging into your MCAS account.

Non-payment for school meals affects the quality of service we are able to offer to the children therefore we need to ensure that all accounts are up to date.

Please note that anyone not clearing the debt in full by the following Monday, will be telephoned to bring in a packed lunch for your child, or asked to take your child home for lunch. Once the debt is cleared, please ensure the account remains in credit.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or if you have difficulty making payment, please contact the school office to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely

Principal

### **APPENDIX 3 – Final Letter**

Our School  
Contact name  
Contact address  
Date

Dear xxxxxxxxxxxx

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child xxxxxxxxxxxx Class: xx despite a previous written reminder, a telephone call and/or agreeing a payment plan that has not been adhered to.

As at xx/xx/xxxx your account is showing a debt of £-xx.xx

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately.

You have 2 ways to pay:

1. In the secure online payment system MCAS, using the login already provided, NB THIS IS OUR PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD

2. Barcoded letter can be provided to pay at Paypoint.

No matter how you pay you can check the account balance anytime by logging into your MCAS account. You can see what meals have been taken and when. The cost of a school meal is £2.50 per day - £12.50 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:

1. To begin legal proceeding to recover the debt, associated costs incurred will also be recovered.
2. To inform Children's Social Care (Social Services) of our concerns that you are not providing a meal for your child at lunchtimes.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately.

Yours sincerely

Principal