



Charging & Remissions Policy inc. School Meal Debt Recovery

Reviewed March 2025
Review date: March 2028

Ratified by the Policy Committee: 13 March 2025

SCHOOL MEALS DEBT RECOVERY

Dobcroft Junior School will ensure that all parents are aware of this policy in the following ways:

- *A letter to parents*
- *The school Website*

Policy Statement

Dobcroft Junior School's School Meal 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 the school budget will be directly affected by any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered, thereby directly affecting all children in school.

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 and also for all infant aged school children.

Parents who meet certain criteria may qualify for Free School Meals. 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.html>

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 arrange payment in advance for a school dinner.

Payment for School Meals

Payment for School meals must be made at least one week in advance. Payment can be made using our online payment system, ParentPay. 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 to which you can subscribe which will remind you if your balance becomes low. We encourage you to use this facility.

Management of School Meal Debts

If any debt exceeds £30, an email (Appendix A) may be sent to the parent/carer requesting immediate payment.

Where a child continues to take unpaid meals and the debt increases to £50, a further letter will be sent (Appendix B) to 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 free school meals or speak confidentially to the Head Teacher.

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If these measures prove unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, the School will inform our Safeguarding Team and formally write to the parent/carer, explaining that the School is not obliged to provide a school dinner where advance payment is not forthcoming or where authorisation for free school dinners has not been received. (Appendix C)

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.

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.

Any additional charges incurred in recovering the debt may be passed onto the parent/carer.

CHARGING & REMISSIONS POLICY

This guidance has been written to provide at-a-glance information and complements the information given in "A Guide to the Law for School Governors" (Chapter 23). This guidance accurately reflects the terms of the Education Act 1996, but it is not a substitute for those terms.

The Governing Body of Dobcroft Junior School recognises the valuable contribution that the wide range of additional activities, including day visits, clubs and residential experiences, can make towards pupils' education.

The Governing Body aims to promote and provide such activities both as part of a broad and balanced curriculum for the pupils of the school and as additional optional activities.

CHARGES

General

The school provides all the books and equipment necessary to study the school's curriculum. From time to time, children are given the opportunity to enrich this learning and to take part in extra curricular activities, for which either a charge is made, or a voluntary contribution requested from parents. We would be unable to provide these activities without the willingness of parents to make such voluntary contributions towards the cost. In particular, residential visits would not go ahead if insufficient voluntary contributions are made.

School Visits

We often arrange visits for the children in connection with the topic they are studying. Some of these visits are local and cost very little whilst others are further afield and more costly. Whenever we organise such a visit, we request that parents make a voluntary contribution towards the cost. If insufficient contributions are pledged, we may be unable to continue with the visit. Families who do not meet the remissions criteria but who are experiencing financial difficulty can approach the Headteacher in confidence to discuss paying in instalments.

Residential Visits

We endeavour to provide the opportunity of residential visits for year 4 and year 6 pupils. If a parent of a child has difficulty in paying, then they are invited to contact the Headteacher in confidence. Prior to the visit all parents are given the opportunity to pay for the visit in instalments. Due to the higher costs involved in residential visits, the visit would need to be cancelled if insufficient voluntary contributions were received. Children who are currently eligible for Pupil Premium are offered 75% towards the cost of their residential visit.

Information to Parents

(To be included on **all visit letters** requiring voluntary contributions and parental permission.)

Governors have agreed that:

'The charge of this visit includes a voluntary contribution. Part of the cost of the visit may include a voluntary contribution towards maintaining staffing levels to ensure adequate supervision of children, if any of the visit falls outside the normal school times. We would be happy to provide you with a breakdown of costs on request.

You will appreciate that this visit will only go ahead if we receive the full charge including the voluntary contribution.'

Individual Instrumental Tuition

The school offers tuition in individual musical instruments for which parents are charged directly by other private providers. A reduction in price can be accessed for children with SEND and Looked After Children can access tuition at no charge. Both are funded through the Sheffield Music Services.

Special Events in School

Each year we enrich the school curriculum with special events such as in- school theatre performances and visiting poets, authors and artists. We usually ask for a voluntary parental contribution towards the cost of such events. As we are often short of contributions for these activities, perhaps due to oversight of parents, the Governing Body agrees to us sending home texts to parents as a gentle reminder.

Charging in Kind

As part of the curriculum, we sometimes ask for payment towards the cost of materials, ingredients, equipment (or the provision of them by parents) for example for D & T, food technology or Art/Craft.

The Governing Body reserve the right to charge for ingredients and materials, or require them to be provided.

Lost Items, Damage

Parents are expected to replace or pay for lost items of school equipment or books.

Parents will be charged for wilful damage carried out by their child to the school building, furniture or other property.

Insurance costs

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The annual amount the school has to pay to cover insurance on all school visits will be divided by the number of pupils on roll. This will be included in visits by 'rounding up' costs of visits to the nearest whole pound.

Optional Extras

Charges may be made for some activities that are known as "optional extras". Where an optional extra is being provided, a charge **can** be made for providing materials, books, instruments, or equipment.

Optional extras are:

- education provided outside of school time that is not:
 - a) part of the National Curriculum;
 - b) part of a syllabus for a prescribed public examination that the pupil is being prepared for at the school; or
 - c) part of religious education.
- transport that is not required to take the pupil to school or to other premises where the local authority/governing body have arranged for the pupil to be provided with education; and
- board and lodging for a pupil on a residential visit.

In calculating the cost of optional extras an amount may be included in relation to:

- any materials, books, instruments, or equipment provided in connection with the optional extra;
- support staff;
- teaching staff engaged under contracts for services purely to provide an optional extra, this includes supply teachers engaged specifically to provide the optional extra; and
- the cost, or a proportion of the costs, for teaching staff employed to provide tuition in playing a musical instrument, where the tuition is an optional extra.

Any charge made in respect of individual pupils must not exceed the actual cost of providing the optional extra activity, divided equally by the number of pupils participating. It must not therefore include an element of subsidy for any other pupils wishing to participate in the activity whose parents are unwilling or unable to pay the full charge.

Furthermore in cases where a small proportion of the activity takes place during school hours the charge **cannot include the cost of alternative provision for those pupils who do not wish to participate**. Therefore no charge can be made for supply teachers to cover for those teachers who are absent from school accompanying pupils on a residential visit.

Participation in any optional extra activity will be on the basis of parental choice and a willingness to meet the charges. **Parental agreement is therefore a necessary pre-requisite for the provision of an optional extra where charges will be made.**

REMISSION

The Governing Body may wish to remit in full or in part, the cost of activities for particular parents, for example, in the case of family hardship. When arranging a chargeable activity such parents are invited to talk to the Headteacher in confidence to discuss the remission of charges in full or in part. The Headteacher in consultation with the Chair of Governors will make authorisation for any such remission.

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Appendix A - Initial Email

Dear Parent/carer or (child name)

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child/ren.

As at **date** our records show an outstanding debt of **£xxxx**

Please arrange for this money to be paid via ParentPay immediately.

NOTE: All meals must be paid for in advance in accordance with our Debt Policy (copy enclosed). If you do not wish for your child/ren to have a school meal, please provide them with a packed lunch.

The cost of a school meal is £2.60 per day - £13 per week.

If you think your child might be entitled to Free School Meals, an application form can be found on the Sheffield City Council Website:

<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/schools-childcare/school-meals.html>

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

Yours sincerely

Amber Higgins

School Administrator

Appendix B – Follow up Letter

Parent or Carer of (child name)

Address

Date

Dear Name

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child despite a previous reminder.

As at **date** your account is showing a debt of **£xxx**

Please see enclosed a report of the school meals your child has taken since your last payment.

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately.

If you are experiencing hardship or think your child could be eligible for free school meals please either apply via <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/schools-childcare/school-meals.html> or contact me directly.

Non-payment for school meals directly affects all children in school. It is important we ensure that all payments are up-to-date and 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 proceedings to recover the debt and to inform social services of our concerns that you are not providing your child a meal at lunch time.

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

Yours sincerely,

Nicola Sexton
Headteacher

Appendix C – Debt Recovery

Parent or Carer of A N Other

Address

Date

Dear Name

With reference to my previous correspondence, I note that you are still in arrears with your dinner payments.

Your debt at today's date is:

Please give this letter your urgent attention and make arrangements to pay for the meals your child has had. The School does not wish to engage the Council's Debt Recovery Service, but should this debt not be paid we will have no other option and an invoice will be raised. This may also affect your overall credit rating if payment is not made.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or if you have difficulty making payment please contact the school office so that a plan can be agreed for the outstanding amount to be cleared.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Sexton

Headteacher