



Heyhouses Endowed C of E Primary School

SCHOOL MEALS PAYMENT & DEBT POLICY

Date: October 2021

Date of next review: October 2022

Introduction

This policy concerns the collection of school meals money and the approach to be taken in the case of debts arising when parents/carers fail to pay for school meals. This policy will be published on the school website. Parents/carers are advised of the policy when their children start at Heyhouses and through periodic reminders in the newsletter.

General Principle

School meals must be paid for in advance, by Friday for the following week. Parents can also opt to pay in advance for up to half a term at a time if this is more convenient.

If children are absent and parents notify school before 10am, their dinner money for that day is credited. If a child leaves school after 10am and a school meal has been ordered for them, then this will still be charged.

Where a child's dinner money account is in credit, refunds will only be given at the end of each term and only in the following circumstances:

- Where a child is leaving our school to attend another.
- Where parents request a refund and have credits totalling over £11.

In all other circumstances the credit will be carried forward to the following term.

We accept children may have an occasional meal, for example if they have forgotten their packed lunch, in that situation payment must be received on the day of the meal or the following day.

If debts are incurred, then the school budget has to pay for them. This means that money which should be spent on all children's education in school is used to pay for debts incurred by individual parents / carers. The governing body see this as unacceptable and request that all parents / carers give this policy their full support.

Any families who are experiencing temporary financial difficulties are asked to contact the school so we can work together through the issue, rather than let arrears accumulate without any communication with the school. Where parents/carers have communicated that they are having difficulty paying the debt, wherever possible the school will work with the parent/carer to agree a suitable repayment period.

Free School Meals Entitlement

Children in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 receive Universal Free School Meals. Children in Key Stage 2 will not be provided with a school meal unless it is paid for, except those confirmed as entitled to Free School Meals. If parents/carers believe that their child(ren) may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals they should contact the County Council. As this allowance is a statutory right for qualifying children it is important that parents/carers make use of it. The school is only allowed to provide free school meals to children where this is officially approved and informed in writing by the Local Authority. If parents/carers need any assistance with the Free School Meals application they should contact the school office.

Procedure for Collection of Arrears

It is accepted that on occasion arrears may arise for various reasons eg children forget their dinner money or are absent on the day it is collected. However, arrears cannot be allowed to accumulate. The governing body has therefore agreed the following policy where arrears arise.

A gentle reminder will be attached to the dinner money letter after one week of accumulated arrears. (see Appendix 1).

A second letter will be sent to the parent/guardian if there are two weeks of arrears. This will state that the debt must be cleared by a specified date and failure to clear the debt will lead to the cessation of the provision of further school meals. (see Appendix 2).

Should payment not be received by the specified date, the Headteacher may decide to issue a cessation of service letter. The Headteacher will assess each case individually, taking into consideration all the circumstances. A third letter will be sent to the parent/guardian which will state that from the specified date no further school meals will be provided for their child(ren) unless the arrears are cleared (see Appendix 3). Once a cessation of service letter has been issued, children will not have the option of transferring back to school meals until the debt has been cleared. If the debt has been cleared, the child will be allowed to transfer back to school meals, however, meals will only be provided if paid for in advance. If payment is not received in advance then the meal service will cease immediately.

A final letter will be issued after payment of arrears is still outstanding after four weeks. This letter informs the parent/guardian that once the final five working day deadline has expired the debt will be passed onto the Debt Recovery Team at Lancashire County Council where legal proceedings may begin (see Appendix 4).

APPENDIX 1
Gentle Reminder

Please pay the highlighted amount to bring your account up to date.
Dinner money should be paid in advance by Friday for the following week.
Our School Meals Payment and Debt Policy is published on the school website.
Thank you.

APPENDIX 2
School Meal Arrears

Dear Parent/ Guardian

Our records show that <child name>'s school meals account is £xxx in arrears.

Please send payment into school as soon as possible, either by sending cash or cheque into the school office. Please make cheques payable to LCC.

If the debt is not cleared within five working days of the date of this letter, you will be asked to provide a daily packed lunch for your child until the debt is cleared.

Our School Meals Payment and Debt Policy is published on the school website. If you have any queries or wish to discuss this matter please contact the school office.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Hodgson
Headteacher

APPENDIX 3

Accumulated School Meal Arrears

Following our letter dated _____ regarding outstanding school dinner money, our records show that this has still not been paid. The amount of arrears is now £_____.

This debt needs to be paid as soon as possible, either by sending cash or cheque into the school office. Please make cheques payable to LCC.

If this debt is not cleared by <date>, you will need to provide a daily packed lunch for your child from <date>. If payment is not received and no packed lunch provided, we will phone you to ask you to come to school with the outstanding arrears or to provide a packed lunch before lunch time. Please note, no further school meals will be provided until this debt is cleared.

Our School Meals Payment and Debt Policy is published on the school website. If you have any queries or wish to discuss this matter please contact the school office.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Hodgson
Headteacher

APPENDIX 4

Non Payment of School Dinner Money Arrears.

Dear Parent/ Guardian

Our records show that you have not cleared the school dinner money arrears for your child(ren) despite previous letters sent home on _____ and _____.

Arrears to date total £_____

I must now inform you that if payment is not received within five working days of the date of this letter, the debt will be referred to the LCC Debt Recovery Team. This is in line with our School Meals Payment and Debt Policy, which is published on the school website. I am obliged to warn you that the debt recovery procedure can result in additional costs and a summons to Court.

Please make a payment as soon as possible, either by sending cash or cheque into the school office. Cheques are to be made payable to LCC.

Should you wish to discuss any issue regarding this debt, please contact the school.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Hodgson
Headteacher