

Ladybirds Nursery

Governor led Provision
at Oulton C.E. First School



OULTON C.E. FIRST SCHOOL

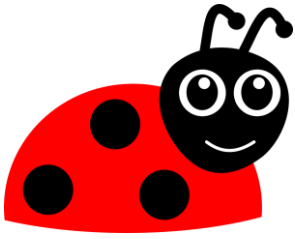
-Policy on School Meals Debt-

Headteacher: Mrs A Graham

Chair Governors: Mr C Wass

Policy Agreed: January 2024

Review date: January 2025



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Background

This policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners is implemented. As the Local Authority is no longer accountable for the administration of dinner money debt the responsibility now falls to the school to pursue instances of non-payment. As a result 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 school meals service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for by someone. Free school meals are available to parents who meet the criteria including the receipt of state benefits. Anyone who may qualify for free school meals should contact the school office for more information. Free school meals are a statutory right and it is important that all parent/carers who qualify take up their child's entitlement so that they can receive a free school meal each day.

Information on the entitlement to free school meals and an application form can be found on the Staffordshire County Council's website:

www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/educationalawardsbenefits/FreeSchoolMeals

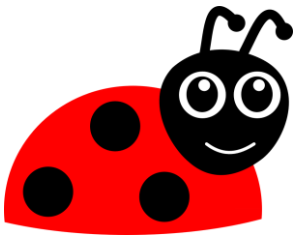
If a child's entitlement to free school meals expires or the parents/carers personal circumstances change the parent/carer must provide a packed lunch or send payment in advance for a school diner.

Cost of School Meals

School meals are available to children at the cost of £2.65 per day or at no cost to those in receipt of free school meals/universal free school meal entitlement. School meals must be paid in advance. Any revision to the school meal prices will be notified to parent/carers the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

Payment for School Meals

Payment is made through parent pay which will be set up once the child has started school. Payments are to be kept up to date and not in arrears.



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Management of school debt

To ensure that the school 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 our pupils.

If a child arrives at school without a packed lunch or payment, or if a child's entitlement has ceased, the school will telephone/text the parent/carer in the first instance to establish if alternative arrangements have been made.

When a child has failed to produce dinner money the school may allow a meal to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary situation e.g. lost or temporary hardship etc. However, details should be recorded in writing and recorded maintained and monitored. If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a letter/text detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting payment directly to the school office within seven days. The same process will be used if a cheque is not honoured by the bank. Prompt action will be taken to address any debt issue at an early stage in order to prevent arrears amassing.

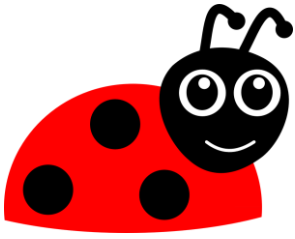
Where a child continues to require meals, the school must establish if the child is entitled to free school meals, or if the parent/carer is experiencing hardship which affects their ability to pay. Under these circumstances the parent/carer should be invited to apply for free school meals or speak confidentially to the Head of School.

When the debt exceeds £11.50 for a child or family a reminder email will be sent to the parent/carer informing them that a packed lunch should be provided to prevent further arrears. If the child is not provided with the requested packed lunch and the parent/carer cannot be contacted, the school will provide a sandwich and a drink (example letter1).

If the debt exceeds £34.50 for a child and action proves unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, the school should inform the local safeguarding team and formally write to the parent/carer, explaining that the school is not obliged to provide a school dinner where advance payment has not been received (example letter 2).

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meals Debts

At each meeting of the Governing Body/Finance Committee, the Head of School 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 and incurring costly referral to



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the school's solicitor. The school however, reserve the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding meal debts and inform the local authority that a child is not being provided with a suitable meal and lunch time.

All write-offs of outstanding debt must be approved by the Governing Body/Finance Committee following submission of details of debt by the Head of School together with the reason for no further action being taken.