



OULTON C.E. FIRST SCHOOL

-School Meal Debt Policy-

Headteacher: Mrs A Graham
Chair Governors: Mr C Wass

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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. 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. Debts that cannot be recovered have to be paid from the school budget, which affects the amount of funds available to run the school.

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 pay for school meals via ParentPay.

Cost of School Meals

School meals are available to children at the cost of £2.57 per day (unless a child is 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

Oulton First School operates a cashless system. Payment for school meals is done through our ParentPay system and all new starters will be issued with information on how to set up their account. Reminders will be sent home if the account falls into arrears.

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 be used for the benefit of all 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.

What to do if you are struggling to pay for meals.

We wish to work with parents to avoid accumulating large debts but we are unable to provide hot meals indefinitely for children with debt on their ParentPay account.

We understand that there may be times when families experience hardship. Please contact the school office, at the earliest opportunity, if you are finding it difficult to pay for school meals. We can provide advice on how to apply for Free School Meals if you feel you may be entitled. Alternatively, you can visit [Apply online - Free School Meals - Staffordshire County Council](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/educationalawardsbenefits/FreeSchoolMeals).

Please feel free to make an appointment to speak to the Head of School or the Headteacher, in confidence, should you experience difficulty.

What we will do if debts are not paid

On a weekly basis, we will send out reminders to all parents/carers who have outstanding debt on their account.

If the debt exceeds £38.55, (the equivalent of 3 weeks' worth of lunches) the school will write to parents/carers formally explaining that the school is not obliged to provide a school meal unless debt is settled and advance payment is made through ParentPay. At this point, we may contact the Local Authority Safeguarding Team, as it is the parent's responsibility to provide a suitable lunch – this includes paying for school meals. We will never see a child go without lunch but we will only provide a sandwich and a drink once debts exceed this amount.

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meals Debts

The Local Governing Committee review school meal debt on a regular basis. The aim of this policy is to reduce the opportunity for large debts to build up and to avoid any court referrals to the school's solicitors to retrieve the debt. The school reserve the right to begin legal proceedings to recover meal debt and inform the Local Authority that a child is not being adequately provided for.

The Local Governing Committee must approve all write-offs of outstanding debt. In order for this to happen, parents/carers will need to meet with the Headteacher to apply for a debt write-off, providing details as to why they are unable to pay the school meal arrears. This information will be treated in the strictest confidence and not shared as part of the meeting with governors.