



Statement of Intent

St Mary's Catholic High School is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all pupils, regardless of financial circumstances, and has established the following policy and procedures to ensure that no child is discriminated against.

The governing body is responsible for ensuring that school meal provisions are accessible to all pupils and that procedures are in place for the recovery of any outstanding debt.

This policy has been adopted to ensure that there is a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents whose children eat school meals. The responsibility falls on the school to pursue instances of non-payment.

The school budget will be directly affected by any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered, thereby directly affecting all pupils in school. We are confident that every parent will agree that this is unacceptable, and we encourage that all parents give this policy their full support.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- The Education Act 1996
- The Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014
- DfE (2018) 'Charging for school activities'
- DfE (2020) 'Governance handbook'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Complaints Procedures Policy
- Debt Recovery Policy
- Charging and Remissions Policy
- Whole-School Food Policy
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2. Charging for school meals

School meals are available to pupils at a cost of **£2.50** or at no cost to those in receipt of FSM entitlement.

Payments will be expected from parents for school meals in advance of the meals being required. Payments can be made daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly or when the account nears zero. Payment can be made using our [SCO online payment system](#) or cash using the cash loader machine.

Pupils with an account with a zero balance, will be allowed to go into a negative balance with a request from the school office. Parents will receive a text message asking them to top up the child's account. There is a minimum top up payment of £5.00.

3. Free school meals (FSM)

There is a statutory right to FSM for families who meet certain criteria. It is important that all parents who qualify take up their entitlement so that their child can receive a school meal each day.

Parents who receive one or more of the following support payments will be entitled to receive FSM (assuming the parent does not receive working tax credit):

- Universal Credit
- Income support
- Income-based jobseeker's allowance
- Income-related employment and support allowance

- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guaranteed element of pension credit
- Child tax credit (provided they are not also entitled to working tax credit and have an annual gross income of no more than the current threshold)
- Working tax credit run-on – paid for four weeks after they stop qualifying for working tax credit

A pupil will only be eligible to receive FSM when a claim for FSM has been made on their behalf and their eligibility has been verified by the school. Parents will take responsibility for ensuring that they have claimed FSM for their child and will be aware that the entitlement to FSM cannot be backdated.

The school will check the eligibility of all applicants for FSM, working with the LA wherever necessary, and will record the date on which they receive the initial application for FSM from a parent and the date on which eligibility is verified. Eligibility checks are carried out promptly to ensure that the most accurate and up-to-date information is being used.

4. Management of school meal debts

Where there is an outstanding payment yet to be received and the acceptable credit period has been surpassed, the SBM will create an invoice outlining the value and reason for the debt, as well as the identity of the parent who owes payment.

Upon creating the invoice and stipulating a date on which it must be paid by, the SBM will record in the school's records that the debt has been set up.

The steps of debt management are as follows:

- **Initial verbal reminder** – the school will initiate an informal correspondence, e.g. via telephone, notifying the parent of debt
- **First formal written reminder** – the school will send an official, dated letter addressed to the parent two weeks after the first informal reminder, acknowledging that the informal reminder took place
- **Second formal written reminder** – the school will send a second formal reminder two weeks after the first formal reminder, citing the details of both previous reminders and stating that concerted efforts have been made to make the parent aware that an outstanding debt is overdue.

Where the parent does not respond to the above reminders, the school will send a follow-up letter to the parent advising them that the case has been referred to the school's legal advisors and governing body.

The school will work with the parent to establish, and agree on, a timeframe for a repayment or, if necessary, a payment plan for separate instalments.

The school will inform parents that debts should be repaid as soon as possible, particularly after repeated reminders; however, delayed payments can be negotiated in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the governing body.

If there is a case where the parent is deemed to be refusing to pay without sufficient reason, the school will consider involving the LA's legal services to resolve the issue and recuperate owed funds.

The school will ensure that a written record is kept of the date and time all reminders are sent and any responses to those reminders, including informal reminders.

5. Exceptional circumstances and remissions

The school ensures that parents of pupils are aware of the help the school can extend to those in financial difficulty. Parents who may be eligible for remissions are those in receipt of any of the benefits outlined in [section 3](#) of this policy.

In a case where there is, or it is suspected that there is, an overdue debt from a family who may qualify for remissions, details of the different types of bursaries available should be sent to the debtor in question.

The governing body is not guaranteed, but may decide, to waive or reduce the outstanding debt in these circumstances.

Appendix A: Reminder letter

St Mary's Catholic High School, Leyland

Royal Avenue, Leyland, PR25 1BS.

Telephone: 01772 421909

Email: head@lsmchs.com

www.lsmchs.com



Re: Reminder letter of payment for school meals

Dear **name of parent**,

According to our records, it appears that there is an outstanding payment for school meals for your child as from today. The amount due for payment is **amount**. We would be grateful if you would kindly clear this outstanding balance straight away. The last payment shown on our system was made on **date**.

If the debt is not paid, the issue will be escalated to the governing body. Please pay by **SCO online**, or, if you wish to pay by cheque, please make it payable to LSMCHS

If you have any queries or difficulties with the payment of this amount, please let us know immediately and we will endeavour to help. Feel free to contact the school office via 01772 421909.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs L. Martin
Business Manager

Appendix B: Final warning letter

St Mary's Catholic High School, Leyland

Royal Avenue, Leyland, PR25 1BS.

Telephone: 01772 421909

Email: head@ismchs.com

www.ismchs.com



Re: Final warning letter for payment of school meals debt

Dear [name of parent](#),

We have written to you previously regarding your child's outstanding school meal fees and, according to our records, we still have not received any payment. The last payment shown on our system was made on [date](#).

The amount due for payment is [amount](#) and, as per our School Meals Provisions and Debt Management Policy, unless we receive payment by [date](#), your child will need to bring a packed lunch until the debt has been paid, via [cheque or cash](#).

If the debt is not paid within this time, the issue will be escalated to the governing body.

If you have any queries or difficulties with the payment of this amount, please let us know and we will endeavour to help.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs L. Martin
Business Manager

Appendix C: Outstanding debt payment plan letter

St Mary's Catholic High School, Leyland

Royal Avenue, Leyland, PR25 1BS.

Telephone: 01772 421909

Email: head@ismchs.com

www.ismchs.com



RE: Outstanding debt payment plan

Dear [name of parent](#),

I am writing to you following our discussion with the governing body regarding your outstanding debts to the school. **[Outline here the details of the meeting you had with the parent and governing body to discuss the payment schedule. Note the date and time of the meeting, outline the conclusions that came from the meeting, and reflect the agreed payment schedule using the table – an example of phrasing can be seen below.]**

As discussed on [date](#) and [time](#), you currently owe the school **£XX** – a full breakdown of which can be found in the invoice issued to you on [date](#), which is attached. We appreciate that money pressures can be stressful and, as agreed in our previous communication with the governing body, we have outlined the agreed payment plan below.

Payment plan

Outstanding debt	
Schedule of payments	
Total number of payments agreed	
Instalment amount	
First payment date	
Second payment date	
Third payment date	

Fourth payment date	
Final payment date	
Payment method	

[Outline below your school's next steps regarding debt recovery – an example of what should be included is outlined below.]

Please note, any missed or late payments within this payment schedule will result in a final notice of payment. Once you have received the final notice, you will have seven days to pay the outstanding fee. If, after this time, no payment has been received, we will initiate formal legal proceedings.

If your financial situation changes and you are able to pay the remaining debts sooner than the schedule, you can contact the headteacher to discuss whether payments will be accepted.

We understand that financial difficulties can place great strain on people. If you are currently experiencing financial difficulties and would like to speak to somebody for advice, you may find the following organisations helpful:

- Money Advice Service, available on 0800 138 7777 or at: <https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en>
- Citizens Advice, available on 0800 144 8848 or at: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/contact-us/contact-us/>
- National Debtline, available on 0808 808 4000 or at: <https://www.nationaldebtline.org/contact-us/>

If you have any additional questions regarding your debt or payment plan with the school, you can contact us at bursar@ismchs.com and we can discuss your options to avoid any issues with repayment.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation with the payment plan.

Best wishes,

Mrs L. Martin
Business Manager