



St Helens Council

SCHOOL MEALS ARREARS POLICY

23rd February 2011

Introduction

This policy provides guidance to help schools manage the collection of school meals income, and procedures to follow when debts arise if parents/guardians fail to pay for school meals.

General

- School meals must be paid for weekly in advance on a Monday morning (or first school day of the week if different)
- Cheque payments can be accepted but must be made payable to 'St Helens Council'
- Meals can be paid for in advance on a monthly or termly basis, if preferred
- Change should not be given to any parent/carer whose child is still in arrears
- Dinner registers must be updated accordingly for any children arriving late in a morning
- If a child has forgotten their packed lunch, schools should seek consent from the parent/guardian before providing the child with a school meal. In the event that consent cannot be obtained, it is a matter for schools to decide whether a meal should be provided. The cost of the meal will be charged to the school account, and therefore schools should seek to recover such cost from the parent/guardian.
- Arrears must not be written off at the end of the academic year, they should be carried forward in the new year registers
- There will be a requirement for schools to send a list of all children in arrears at the end of each school term to the Council's CYPS Finance Section
- Milk money should be collected on a termly or annual basis, at the beginning of the term or academic year
- Refunds may be given where appropriate out of cash received providing they have been clearly recorded, authorised and receipted. Refunds should only be given in the following circumstances:
 - When entitlement to free school meals overlaps a period when the parent/guardian has been paying for the meals
 - When parents/guardians have paid for meals termly in advance and are subsequently in credit at the end of the term due to pupil absences

If payment has been received by cheque, please wait 2 weeks before giving any cash refund to ensure that the cheque has cleared at the bank.

Free School Meals

- Only children who are confirmed as being entitled to free school meals by the Education Benefits team should receive free school meals (confirmation either by inclusion on the official list or telephone call to Education Benefits)
- Once a child is removed from the official list the parent/guardian must immediately start to pay for their school meals or make alternative provision.

- Any apparent gaps in entitlement to free school meals should be checked with the Education Benefits section as sometimes entitlement can be backdated and any arrears therefore cancelled

Arrears Procedure

- Reminder letter sent to parent/guardian on the first day of non-payment of meals (See Appendix 1)
- Letter A sent after 5 school days have passed without payment (See Appendix 2)
- Letter B sent after 10 school days have passed without payment – please post first class (See Appendix 3). Where arrears are in excess of two weeks and no attempt has been made to reduce the arrears, parents/guardians should be informed that they must make alternative arrangements for their child's midday meal until the arrears are cleared.
- If no payment is received after 15 school days have passed then the matter should be referred to the Council's CYPS Finance Section for the attention of Mrs T Glover (tel: 01744 671819). Child and parent/guardian's full name, address and full period of non-payment should be supplied along with copies of all letters sent. Once all information is received, the Finance Section will endeavour to process the arrears within two weeks excluding school holidays.
- If a parent/guardian makes arrangements to pay and the arrears reduce each week then there is no requirement to send the above letters. As long as the outstanding arrears are reducing, and future school meals are paid for in advance, school meals can continue to be provided
- Copies should be kept of all letters sent
- Once a parent/guardian has been invoiced by the Council no further attempts at recovering the debt should be made by the school and no payments should be accepted by the school against this invoice. Methods of payment as stated on the invoice should be followed. A copy of the invoice will be sent to the school at which point the school should enter a credit to the value of the invoice on the dinner register against the child's name, and adjust the debit balance b/fwd on the Provision of School Meals and Milk form with supporting details (i.e. invoice number)
- If the parent/guardian requests that the child goes back onto paid school meals then the school must check with Mrs T Glover that the previous arrears have been cleared
- If school becomes aware of any change in circumstances for a family which may have contributed to the non-payment of school meals, the family should be referred to the appropriate agencies e.g. Education Benefits Section, Education Welfare Service
- Once the Council's debt recovery section has exhausted all methods of recovering the outstanding arrears, the corporate Debt Recovery Policy will be followed to recover the debt. If the matter does proceed to court there may be a requirement for a representative from the school to attend and give evidence.

In addition to the above procedures schools may wish to contact parents/guardians by telephone or speak face to face on the playground to discuss arrangements to pay. Reminder messages may also be sent by 'Teachers-2-Parents' text messaging service.

If schools do not comply with the procedures in relation to school meals arrears, any resultant arrears will be charged to the school.

Leavers

- Child transfers to another school
 - Contact new school if within borough of St Helens and inform them of the level of arrears
 - Letter C sent to parent/guardian requesting the arrears are cleared – please post first class (See Appendix 4)
 - If a child leaves no forwarding address, contact new school and request letter is passed on to the parent/guardian
 - If no payment is received within 10 school days of the child leaving, the debt should be referred to the Council's CYPS Finance Section for the attention of Mrs T Glover

NB. The school meal debt does not transfer with the child.

- Year 6 children
 - Two weeks before the end of the school year a forecast of charges should be calculated and sent to every parent/guardian of Year 6 children
 - Every attempt should be made to collect money before the end of term from any Year 6 child who is in arrears
 - During the first week back in September, Letter C should be sent to any parent/guardian with outstanding arrears for their children
 - If no payment is received within 10 school days any outstanding debts for previous Year 6 children should be referred to the Council's CYPS Finance Section for the attention of Mrs T Glover. Any arrears must be carried forward in the school dinner registers until advised otherwise

Adult Meals

- Staff requiring a school meal should be entered either in the class register or on a separate staff register
- Staff meals paid by the individual should be collected on a weekly basis and paid into the Council's account via the cash income system
- Duty meals provided for any staff should be paid for by the school budget (charged to subjective code 3152 and VAT indicator O) and a cheque raised at least every half term to cover the cost of these meals. The cheques should be paid into the Council's account via the cash income system

Provision of School Meals and Milk Reconciliation Sheets

- Reconciliation sheets must be completed on a weekly basis and returned to the Finance Section, Atlas House
- If free school meals are awarded and backdated, any arrears in the dinner register need to be adjusted and the number of free/paid meals adjusted appropriately on the Provision of School Meals and Milk form.

Banking Arrangements

- Registers should be accurately completed, up to date and signed by the Head Teacher on a weekly basis
- Total cash collected and banked should reconcile to the school meal records
- Periodically, the Head Teacher should confirm that income received reconciles to the bank paying in records and evidences this on the banking slip
- Monies should be banked on a regular basis, at least weekly, and large amounts of monies should not be left in the safe over the weekend
- Cash income forms should be completed and sent to the Income Section by one of the following methods:
 - faxed and original posted
 - scanned and e-mailed, and original posted
 - original sent via black bag
 - original posted

Income Codes

VAT Ind

Primary Schools:

Pupil meals - AAZAB8031	OTS
Pupil milk - AAZAB8016	OTS
Adult meals paid by school - AAZAB8030	OTS
Adult meals paid by individual - AAZAB8030	STD

Special schools:

Pupil meals - ACZAB8031	OTS
Pupil milk - ACZAB8016	OTS
Adult meals paid by school - ACZAB8030	OTS
Adult meals paid by individual - ACZAB8030	STD

Appendix 1

Reminder Letter

School Name

CHILD'S NAME _____ CLASS _____

Date:

Dear Parent/Guardian

School meals must be paid for in advance on Monday mornings (or first school day of the week if different). Please send in £_____ dinner money tomorrow. If you have any queries please contact the school office. Cheques must be made payable to 'St Helens Council'.

Yours sincerely

School Business Manager/School Office Manager

Appendix 2

Letter A – After non-payment for 5 school days

<School Letterhead>

<Parent/Guardian full name>

<Address line 1>

<Address line 2>

<Address line 3>

<Address line 4>

Date: < **/**/ ** >

Dear <Parent/Guardian's name>

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child <Name> for the period < **/**/ ** > to < **/**/ ** >

School meals currently cost < £**.** > and must be paid for in advance on a Monday morning.

As at < **/**/ ** > your account is showing arrears of < £**.** >

Please make arrangements to pay the outstanding arrears immediately. If you have any problems in making this payment please contact the school office.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

Appendix 3

Letter B – After non-payment for 10 school days

<School Letterhead>

<Parent/Guardian full name>

<Address line 1>

<Address line 2>

<Address line 3>

<Address line 4>

Date: < **/**/** >

Dear <Parent/Guardian's name>

Our records show that you have not cleared dinner money arrears for your child <Name> despite a previous written request on < **/**/** >.

As at < **/**/** > your account is showing arrears of < £**.** >

I must inform you that if payment is not received within 5 working days of the date of this letter I will have to refer you to the Council's Debt Recovery Section.

I am obliged to warn you that the debt recovery procedure can result in a summons to Court.

Until the debt is cleared I am forced to instruct you to make alternative arrangements for your child's midday meal.

It is with regret that this debt has caused action to be taken. Should you wish to discuss any issue regarding this debt please contact the school.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

Appendix 4

Letter C – School leavers

<School Letterhead>

<Parent/Guardian full name>

<Address line 1>

<Address line 2>

<Address line 3>

<Address line 4>

Date: <**/**/**>

Dear <Parent/Guardian's name>

According to our records <Name> left this school on <**/**/**>. At this date your school meals account is in arrears by <£**.**>.

Please make arrangements to pay the outstanding arrears immediately. I must inform you that if payment is not received within 10 working days of the date of this letter I will have to refer you to the Council's Debt Recovery Section.

I am obliged to warn you that the debt recovery procedure can result in a summons to Court.

{ *School transfers within St Helens borough only – For information purposes, the details of this debt will be forwarded to your child's new school.* }

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

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher