



Plympton St Maurice
Primary School

School Meals Debt Recovery Policy

This policy has been written to help our Schools adopt a consistent approach to debt incurred by parents whose children take school dinners. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

The Free School Meals system is there for parents of children of all ages to claim if they are in receipt of certain benefits; information is available from the school office or from Plymouth City Council / Catered's web site. Free School Meals eligibility also brings valuable additional funding into school to be spent on your child's education. Please visit [Free school meals | PLYMOUTH.GOV.UK](https://www.plymouth.gov.uk/free-school-meals) for further information.

This policy only relates to pupils in Key Stage 2 (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) whose parents pay for school meals as all pupils in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are now entitled to receive Universal Infant Free School Meals.

The School wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals which they then find difficult to clear.

Plympton St Maurice Primary School feel that a system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach. We understand that it may seem a very hard stance as there has been a country-wide culture of debt tolerance. However, it will become easy to maintain once parents realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for FSM or UIFSM entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for. Our Schools online dinner money system highlights debt immediately so keeping track is easy.

It is very time consuming for our school staff to continually chase parents for payment - by letter, phone call or in person. It is also highly embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative effect on our relationships with families.

There will occasionally be a decision to be made by our schools about whether a child should be refused a meal in school if they have not paid. However, schools are no different than any other café / restaurant and meals taken must be paid for.

The School will make parents aware of this policy in the following ways:

- A letter to parents;
- Reminders in the School's newsletter;
- The School website.

This will ensure that all parents get the same message in a consistent way. This will be done at least once each year.

All parents will be reminded about the policy when their child joins KS2.

The letter to parents is attached as Appendix 1.

Key Information

1. All school lunches must be paid for in advance
2. No child should be sent to School with no money in their account and expect to be given a meal
3. Where a debt has accrued amounting to £13 (5 meals at £2.80 per meal) parents will be asked to provide packed lunches from home until the debt has been cleared
4. Parents who do not want their child to have a school meal should provide a healthy packed lunch

Debt Recovery policy implementation

Daily /Weekly check

£2.75 - £13.75 debt

- Debt report checked
- A reminder letter, text or phone call will be given to all parents reminding them to top up account

£13.76 debt to £27.50

- A reminder letter will be issued to all asking parents to top up account before any further meals are ordered and to send their child to school with a packed lunch (Appendix 2)

£27.51 plus

- A letter will be issued to parents asking that debt be cleared within 7 days or that the debt will be referred to the Trust for recovery under their debt recovery procedures. Parents will again be asked not order any meals until their account is in credit and to send their child to school with a packed lunch (Appendix 3)

Date of policy/review
Policy April 2024
Review Autumn 2024

Appendix 1

Dear Parents / Carers

School Meals Debt Recovery Policy – Key Stage 2 children

Due to an increase in the number of school meals that are regularly not being paid for and to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals, we have, like all other schools, decided to adopt a **No Debt** policy relating to school meals.

We hope that all parents will give this policy their full support. As we all know, nobody takes their child to cafes/restaurants and expect them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school.

School meals must be paid for in advance using our online payment system (please contact us if there is a genuine reason e.g. no access to a computer, that you are unable to pay in this way and we will try to help with an alternative).

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the School may grant a debt allowance of 5 meals. However, this debt must be cleared and the account topped up as soon as possible.

If the debt is not cleared, parents must provide a packed lunch. In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the office will phone the parent to ask them to clear the outstanding balance or provide a packed lunch before lunchtime.

If the debt rises and payment is not received within 1 week of the final reminder letter, as a school we will be forced to refer the debt to the Trust Board. The School's Education Welfare Officer and Social Services may also be informed that these parents are not carrying out their responsibility of care by not providing food for their children at lunchtime.

By implementing this debt policy we are aiming to help parents manage school dinner money better and to ensure that money given to the school for educational purposes is spent in the correct way.

If you believe that you may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals please contact the office for more details. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. We will help you all we can with your application.

If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Appendix 2

Dinner Money
Letter 1

Dinner Money Balances

We have checked the balance on your child's dinner money account today and unfortunately this now amounts to - £xxxxxxxxxx

As you will be aware, all school meals must be paid for in advance using our SchoolMoney payment system (unless you have made alternative arrangements with us) and we must therefore ask you to clear the outstanding balance and top up your child's account before any further meals are taken.

If your child orders a further meal we will unfortunately have no choice but to telephone to ask you to provide a packed lunch. We do not like doing this as it causes embarrassment to us both and we would therefore ask that you clear the account so that this can be avoided.

If you believe you may qualify for Free School Meals, please submit an online Free School Meals application available via the schools website under 'Food in School' or contact the office for more details.. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. We will help you all we can with your application.

We look forward to receiving your payment, however if you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

Dinner Money letter 2

Dinner Money Balances

We have checked the balance on your child's dinner money account today and unfortunately this now amounts to - £xxxxxxxxxx

As stated in our School Meal Debt Recovery Policy, all school meals must be paid for in advance using our SchoolMoney payment system (unless you have made alternative arrangements with us) and we must therefore ask you to clear the outstanding balance within the next 7 days and top up your child's account before any further meals are taken.

If your child orders a further meal we will unfortunately have no choice but to telephone to ask you to provide a packed lunch. We do not like doing this as it causes embarrassment to us both and we would therefore ask that you clear the account so that this can be avoided.

If payment is not received within 7 days we will unfortunately have to refer the debt to the Trust Board. We must implement our policy as we have to ensure that the money given to the school for educational purposes is spent in the correct way.

If you believe you may qualify for Free School Meals, please submit an online Free School Meals application available via the schools website under 'Food in School' or contact the office for more details. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. We will help you all we can with your application.

We look forward to receiving your payment, however if you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher