

## **Holly Trees Primary School School Meals Debt Policy**

This policy has been written to help our school 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.

There will occasionally be the decision to be made about whether a child should be refused a meal in school if they have not paid. However, the school meals service is no different than any other business and the meals must be paid for by someone.

Parents should be able to relate to the situation that they cannot take their child to a restaurant and expect them to be given food without paying. Yet a minority of parents in the school expect us to provide food for their children without paying for it. The Free School Meals system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals, there should be no excuses.

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

The governors at Holly Trees 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 culture of debt tolerance and that this will be tough to implement. However, it will become easy to maintain once parents realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for FSM entitlement. Every other meal 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 prospectus
- 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, more often when it is first introduced.

All parents will be provided with a copy of the policy when their child joins the school.

The letter to parents is attached as Appendix 1.

## **Key Information**

1. All parents are provided with a copy of the debt policy when their child joins the school.
2. All school lunches must be paid for in advance
3. No child should be sent to school with no money in their account and expect to be given a meal
4. Parents who don't want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch

## **Debt policy implementation**

### **Level 1**

Indicator: A child's account goes into debt

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?  
Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?  
Check 3 does this parent normally pay on time, is this just a one off?

#### Action 1:

- Send a 'Gentle debt reminder'

### **Level 2**

Indicator: A child comes to school again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?  
Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?  
Check 3 has this parent made contact?

#### Action 2: Personal contact

- Someone will phone the parent to ask them to either bring the money into school or bring sandwiches in before lunchtime

### **Level 3**

Indicator: The parent does not comply with any of these options,

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?  
Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?  
Check 3 has this parent made contact?

#### Action 3: send strong debt letter

The School Business Manager/Headteacher will send a final letter.

### **Level 4**

Indicator: The parent consistently does not comply with any of these options,

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?  
Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?  
Check 3 has this parent made contact?

#### **Action 4: bring in outside agencies**

- Small claims court, social services

Dear Parents / Carers

### School Meals Policy

Unfortunately due to an increase in the number of school meals that are regularly not being paid for, as from 7<sup>th</sup> September 2015, Holly Trees Primary School will adopt a NO DEBT policy relating to the school meals.

If debts are incurred, then the school budget has to pay for them. I am sure everybody will agree that this is unacceptable and we hope that all parents give this policy their full support. As we all know nobody takes their child to a restaurant and expect them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school.

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.

School lunches must be paid for in advance using the online payment system Agora, which is available at [www.simsagora.co.uk](http://www.simsagora.co.uk).

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of one meal. However this debt must be paid next day and future meals must be paid in advanced before any meal is provided.

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 come to school with the money or provide sandwiches before lunch time.

If payment of the debt is not received by the next day, the Headteacher reserves the right to inform the Governing Body, who may decide to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt. Social services may also be informed that these parents are not carrying out the responsibility of care by not providing food for their children at lunchtime.

We hope that by implementing this debt policy we are able to help parents manage school dinner money better and at the same time ensure that all the money that is for children's learning is available.

If you have any concerns please don't hesitate in contacting me.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Paula Masters  
Head Teacher