



Park Spring Primary School Dinner Money Debt Policy

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1. Background

At Park Spring Primary School the Dinner Money Debt Policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners. Money owed affects the school overall budget and must be settled promptly.

The school budget has to directly fund any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered through the Local Authority, thereby directly affecting the amount of money that is available to provide education to all pupils.

2. Legislation, statutory requirements, and statutory guidance

The Schools Meals Service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for by someone. Free School Meals are available for parents who meet certain criteria including the receipt of state benefits. Anyone who may qualify for Free School Meals should contact the school office for further information.

Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that all parents/carers who qualify take up their child's entitlement so that they can receive a School meal each day. The office staff will assist any parent in completing an application form for free school meals or alternatively you can go to your local One Stop Centre and apply with them.

If a child's entitlement to free school meals expires or the parents' or carers' personal circumstances change the parent/carer must provide a packed lunch or send payment in advance for a school dinner.

If a child forgets their packed lunch and is given a school meal, parents must pay for the meal on the same day or the following morning at the latest (except for children in receipt of Free School Meals).

3. Cost of School Meals

School meals are available to children at a cost to families per meal or at no cost to those in receipt of Free School Meals entitlement or Reception and Key Stage One children who have an entitlement to free school meals due to government legislation. School meals must be paid for in advance. Any revision to the school meal prices will be notified to parents/carers at least one week prior taking effect.

4. Payment for School Meals

Payments for School Meals are to be via your ParentPay account. Any issues with accessing your account should be reported to ParentPay, or you could speak to a member of the school office who may be able to assist you.

5. Management of School Meal Debts

To ensure that the School's budget is not adversely affected by the cost of School meal debt, the Governors agree that the fairest system to all families is to pursue a 'Zero Tolerance' approach. Although this may seem overly strict to some parents/carers, it is important that the school budget is spent for the benefit of all our pupils and not a small number of pupils.

When payment has not been made, the school may allow a meal to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary situation, e.g. lost or forgotten packed lunch, temporary hardship etc. However, details should be passed to school in writing and a record maintained and monitored.

Where a child continues to require meals, the School should establish if the child is entitled to free school meals, or if the parent/carer is experiencing hardship which affects their ability to pay. Under these circumstances, the parent/carer should be invited to apply for free school meals or speak confidentially to the Head Teacher or Family Liaison Officer.

If the outstanding debt remains unpaid, the school will take action to recover this. A final letter will be sent to the parents/carers informing them that the school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to secure payment. Parents must also be aware that further school meals for their children will need to be paid at least a month in advance. In rare cases in which payment is not made, the School reserves the right to cease to provide the service of school meals where debts are recurring over a sustained period of time. In this instance, parents should provide a packed lunch or collect their child at lunchtime. These circumstances must be authorised by the Headteacher prior to school meals being ceased.

Weekly statements will be sent automatically via ParentPay.

If the debt exceeds £25, you will receive a text reminder from the school office to chase payment.

If the debt exceeds £35, a phone call home will be made to request that the parent make payment.

When the debt exceeds £40 for a child or family, a formal letter/email will be sent to the parent/carer informing them to provide their child/children with a packed lunch to prevent further arrears.

If the debt exceeds £45 for a family and/or action proves unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, the School should formally write to the parent/carer, explaining that the School is not obliged to provide a school dinner where advance payment is not forthcoming or where authorisation for free school dinners has not been received. This action must first be authorised by the Headteacher.

If we do not hear from families and full payment has not been received within 6 weeks from the date of the final letter, we will have no alternative than to pass this matter to Leeds City Council Finance Division who will then attempt to recover this debt.

6. Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts

The Head Teacher will provide Governors regularly with details of any outstanding dinner money debt and the current position with regard to such debt. The aim of the School's Dinner Money Debt policy is to minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up and incurring costly referral to the School's Legal Team or Local Authority. The School does, however, reserve the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal debts and inform the local authority that a child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunchtime.