



# **Thistly Meadow Primary School DEBT COLLECTION POLICY**



# DEBT COLLECTION POLICY

## Rationale

This policy has been adopted to ensure a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers or others who may incur charges due to the school. Unpaid debts cannot be accommodated from the school budget, thereby directly affecting the amount of money that is available to provide a quality education to all pupils.

## Payments of fees due to the school

The school operates an online payment system using Parentmail. This makes it convenient for parents to make payments online by bank card or Paypal. This is the preferred method of the school as it reduces administration time and costs for the school and parents enjoy the speed and flexibility of this method. Parents can still make payments by cash or cheque at the school office if they wish.

## School Meals

School meals are provided by Leicestershire School Foods Support (LSFS) who have been providing quality school dinners to Thistly Meadow and many other schools across Leicestershire for many years. The charges for school meals are set by LSFS and the school makes no profit on meal costs. Any changes to the costs of meals are notified to parents/carers. The school also provides drinks and juice cartons for the children to purchase. The school also sells toast on a cash basis to children every Thursday at break time.

All infant children (Foundation, Years 1 and 2) receive free school meals under the Universal Infant Free School Meal scheme (UIFSM) introduced by the government in 2014.

Free School Meals are available to all parents who receive certain benefits. At the time of writing these are:

- Income Based Job Seekers Allowance
- Income Support (IS)
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Guaranteed Element of State Pension Credit
- Support under part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 if you're an asylum seeker
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

- Children who receive Income Support (IS) or Income Based Jobseekers Allowance in their own right can also get free school meals.

Parents can apply for free school meals by requesting an application form from the school office or contacting the free school meals team on 0116 3055770. More information can be found on the Leicestershire County Council website here:

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/social-care-and-supporting-families/free-school-meals>

It is important that if parents receive a qualifying benefit **they still need to register for free school meals** under the eligibility scheme even if their child receive a meal under the UIFSM scheme. This means that the school can then get extra money to help with the child's education. This is called the Pupil Premium grant and is paid directly to schools.

For more information, please see the school's Pupil Premium policy.

If a child's entitlement to free school meals changes we will be notified by Leicestershire County Council and parents/carers must provide a packed lunch or pay for meals in the usual way.

The school operates a cashless catering system so parents 'top up' their child's dinner money on Parentmail which maintains a running balance of the dinner money account. Meals are charged through an electronic till in the kitchen. Parents must pay for their child's meal in advance.

### **Debt procedures**

In collecting any dinner money debts the following process will be followed:

1. Parents are automatically notified by Parentmail message if their child's dinner money balance falls below £5.00.
2. Where a debt exceeds £10 for a child or family, a letter (Appendix A) will be sent to the parents/carers informing them they will have to provide a packed lunch until the arrears are repaid. If the arrears remain unpaid and the child does not bring a packed lunch, the school will provide the child with a sandwich and a drink only.
3. Where a debt remains unpaid after a further seven days the school will attempt to contact the parent by telephone and post a further letter to parents requesting that they clear the outstanding balance (Appendix B).
4. The school reserves the right to take legal action to recover any outstanding debts.

## **Leavers**

For pupils leaving the school, any dinner money balances will be transferred as follows:

1. For credit balances, monies will be used to pay other fees if they are outstanding i.e. Breakfast and After School Club, otherwise unless the parent requests a refund, monies will be transferred to the school funds.
2. For debit balances the debt collection procedures outlined above will be followed
3. If there are siblings remaining in schools all balances will be transferred to the sibling's dinner money account, whether in debit or credit.

## **Breakfast and After School club (BASC) fees**

The school provides extended care before and after school to support working parents.

Fees are payable in advance and invoices are issued on the 20th of each month by Parentmail, for the following month's fees. All payments need to be received by the first day of the forthcoming month to ensure attendance at the BASC. Parents can also make payment under the government's Tax-Free Childcare scheme and employee Childcare Voucher schemes.

Fees are competitive and the price per session applies to all children. This is payable for all booked sessions including when a child is ill, on holiday (regardless of the amount of notice given) occasional days off, school trips or closure of Thistly Meadow Primary School due to an unforeseen event.

In collecting any BASC debts the following process will be followed:

1. Two reminders are automatically sent by Parentmail following the issue of an invoice.
2. After a further 14 days, if payment has not been received, a letter (Appendix C) will be sent to parents requesting full repayment. If, after a further 14 days, fees remain unpaid a further letter (Appendix D) will be sent requesting full repayment.
3. The school will work with parents to ensure fees are paid, however if a request for payments and/or payment proposals are not forthcoming then the school will advise parents that their child's place at the breakfast and after school club may be withdrawn.
4. The school reserves the right to take legal action to recover any outstanding debts.

## **Payment proposal**

The governing body understand that from time to time parents/carers may experience

financial difficulties and where possible will be flexible and supportive. However, the school cannot incur debts incurred by parents and carers due from the provision of high quality services.

In the event of any parent/carer experiencing difficulties in the payment of debts due to the school, we would expect parents/carers to communicate with the school promptly and honestly and any payment proposals offered should be realistic and achievable.

## Appendix A

School Meals Letter 1

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

(Address Line 1)

(Address Line 2)

(Address Line 3)

(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)

According to the School's records your child xxxxxx's dinner money account is showing a debt of £xx. The current cost of a school meal is £2.35 per day.

In order that the school's budget is not used to clear your child's debt please make arrangements for the outstanding dinner money debt to be paid immediately. Until this amount is repaid, please send your child to school with a packed lunch. If your child does not bring a packed lunch, the school will provide your child with a sandwich and a drink of water only.

Once you have cleared the current debt I should be grateful if you could ensure that you keep your account in credit.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information. Remember that Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify; your child will then receive a school meal each day. Parents can apply for free school meals by requesting an application form from the school office or contacting the free school meals team on 0116 3055770. More information can be found on the Leicestershire County Council website here

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/social-care-and-supporting-families/free-school-meals>

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or wish to discuss the matter further please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

Yours sincerely

Mr C Bowpitt

Executive Head Teacher

## Appendix B

School Meals Letter 2

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

(Address Line 1)

(Address Line 2)

(Address Line 3)

(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)

I am writing regarding the current level of outstanding school meal debt that is showing on your account. Despite previous correspondences and messages the debt for your child xx in Year xx is still outstanding. The school's records show that as at xx/xx/xx your account is £x in debt. I would ask that you please make arrangements to clear this debt immediately and take steps to ensure your account is kept in credit in the future.

Since the school has to fund all school meal debts from its budget it is essential that all payments are up to date so that the quality of learning provided to all pupils is maintained. Unfortunately, if the debt is not cleared by xxxxx a school meal or sandwich will no longer be provided to your child and you must make your own arrangements for your child's lunch.

The school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the outstanding debt.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely

Mr C Bowpitt  
Executive Head Teacher



## Appendix C

BASC Letter 1

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

(Address Line 1)

(Address Line 2)

(Address Line 3)

(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

### Breakfast and After School Club fees (Pupil Name)

Our records show that we have not received any payment for Breakfast and After School Club for the following month(s):

MONTH	£xx
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These amounts have been invoiced by Parentmail and can be paid by logging into your account and going to 'Shop' where they can be paid by debit/credit card or Paypal.

Payments can also be made to the school office by cash or cheque.

Please note that invoices are issued on the 20<sup>th</sup> of every month for the next month's fees, to be paid by the end of the month.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely

Mr C Bowpitt  
Executive Head Teacher

## Appendix D

BASC Letter 2

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

(Address Line 1)

(Address Line 2)

(Address Line 3)

(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

### Breakfast and After School Club fees (Pupil Name)

Despite previous correspondence our records show that we have still not received any payment for Breakfast and After School Club/Pre-School for the following month(s):

MONTH	£xx
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I would ask that you please make arrangements to clear this debt immediately and take steps to ensure your fees are paid by the end of the month in future. Unfortunately, if the debt is not cleared by xxxxx your child's place at Breakfast and After School Club School will be withdrawn.

The school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the outstanding debt. In order to avoid this, please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely

Mr C Bowpitt  
Executive Head Teacher

Version	Date	Comment
V2	Date created:3/9/2019 Review date: Sept 2022	A Gordon