

Moreton C. of E. Primary School

School Debt Policy



Reviewed on:

Date:

Last reviewed:

Date:

**Next review due
by:**

This policy aims to help our school to adopt a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers with a view to eliminating it completely. It provides clarity and consistency in managing debt and will also help parents and carers clearly understand what is expected of them.

The services provided by school are no different to those provided by any other business and meals and other services must be paid for by someone. In the case of school meals for example, free meals can only be offered to children whose parents qualify for Free School Meals entitlement. If you believe you may qualify for Free School Meals please apply via <https://www.essex.gov.uk/free-school-meals>.

Free School Meals are available for parents who meet certain criteria including the receipt of state benefits.

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.

Similarly, sessions booked for our out of hours childcare provision must be paid for in advance, and in full, at the time of booking.

Most parents make prompt payment for services received; however a minority of parents do not pay on time for services offered by the school. This puts the school in the position of subsidising a few families with funding that is intended by law for all children, as well as causing considerable extra work for office staff.

To make payments to the schools account we ask that this is done via **Pupil Asset**, please speak to a member of the office staff if you have not received an activation email.

Please note that we are a **Cashless School**, we no longer accept any payments in cash.

Provision of School Meals

School meals are available to pupils at a cost of **£2.70** per day or at no cost to children in Early Years and Key Stage 1 and to those in receipt of a free meal entitlement.

The payment for meals is required in advance on a daily, weekly, monthly or half termly basis.

- School meals are chosen on the day. These are paid for online, and in advance, by using payment facility **Pupil Asset**
- Meals can be booked on a daily, weekly or half-termly basis.
- In the case of absence, payment received will be credited to the following week or for the next meal booked.

Provision of childcare in our Breakfast School Club Childcare

facilities are available to pupils as follows:

- In the mornings from **7:45 – 8:45am** daily, and costs **£4.00** per day. This includes breakfast and drinks for the children.
- Places can be booked on a full time or part time basis.
- Costs for each session are fixed and there is no reduction in payment for part sessions taken

On rare occasions, we understand that there are changes in circumstances, which may mean that you need a last minute place, in which case it is likely to be possible to contact the Office and arrange payment on the day.

If payment has not been made

To ensure that the school's budget is not adversely affected by the cost of school meal debt or debt incurred from other services, the Governors consider the fairest system to all families is to pursue a 'Zero Tolerance' approach i.e. the school does not accept debt. Although, this may seem harsh to some parents, it is important that the school budget is spent for the benefit of all our pupils and not a small number.

If a child arrives at school without a packed lunch or payment, or if a child's entitlement to free school dinners has ceased, the school will telephone the parent/carer in the first instance to establish if alternative arrangements have been made.

When a child has failed to produce dinner money the school may allow a meal to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary situation e.g. lost or forgotten dinner money, temporary hardship etc. however details should be recorded in writing and a record maintained and monitored.

If a child takes a school meal, which has not been paid for, a letter detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting payment directly to the school within 7 days. Prompt action will be taken to address any debt issue at an early stage in order to prevent arrears amassing.

Where a child continues to require meals, the school must 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.

When the debt exceeds **£10** for a *child or family* an email must be sent to the parent/carer informing them the arrears on dinner money is due for payment.

If the debt exceeds **£20** we will advise the parents that we will no longer be able to offer a school dinner until the arrears are paid in full. For a family and/or action proves unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, the school may inform the local Safeguarding Team and formally write to the parent/carer, explaining that the school is not obliged to provide a school dinner where payment is not forthcoming or where authorisation for Free School Meals has not been received. If the child/children is/are not provided with the requested packed lunch and the parent/carer cannot be contacted, the school will provide a **snack and a drink only**

The school will, in exceptional circumstances, postpone the refusal to provide meals where parents have advised the school of their financial situation and school is satisfied that the funding will be forthcoming.

Parents who are experiencing difficulty in paying for a chargeable service offered by the school should inform the school office immediately. In most circumstances a payment plan can be agreed to help parents clear their debt to the school as soon as possible. Large debts left unpaid may be passed to a professional debt collection firm to legally recover.

Debt policy implementation

Key Information

1. A copy of the debt policy is available on the school web site
2. All services provided including school lunches; music tuition 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 or music lessons
4. Parents who don't want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch

Parents are contacted midweek by phone or email if there is insufficient credit on their account for that week.

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts

At each meeting of the Governing Body/Resources Committee, the Head Teacher will provide Governors 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 policy is to minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up and incurring costly referral to the school's solicitors. The school does however, reserve the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal debts/outstanding debts and inform the local authority that a child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.