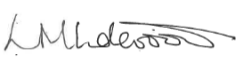


Policy Date:	November 2022	Version: 1.3		
Policy Review Date:	November 2025	Mrs Louise Underwood (Head Teacher)		2.11.2022
Adopted by Governing Body: March 2018 (v. 1.1), May 2019 (v 1.2)				
Chair Of Governors		C Brown		4.11.2022



Avenue Primary School

Debt Policy 2022 - 2025



Background

Avenue Primary School Debt Policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners, use the school's after care club, extra-curricular club facilities or attend visits and trips that incur a fee; and are collected late at the end of the school day, organisations that hire the school facilities as a 'letting'.

The aim of the School's debt policy is to minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up. Also, to reduce the costs for referral to the School's legal team through the Local Authority for the debtors.

Unpaid debts directly affect the amount of money that is available to provide education to all pupils, which is not acceptable.

The school will, in the case of persistent debt, be supported of the Local Authority legal team and they will pursue the debt on school's behalf after all attempts by school have been exhausted.

Provision of School Meals

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 children whose 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.

Information on the entitlement to free school meals and an application form can be found on the Leicester City Council's website:

<https://www.leicester.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/grants-and-allowances/free-school-meals/>

Cost of School Meals (Key Stage 2 – Years 3 – 6)

School meals are available to children at a cost of £2.41 per day or at no cost to those entitled to a Free School Meals. School meals **must** be paid for in advance. Any revision to the school meal prices, will be notified to parents/carers the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

Payment for School Meals / Trip & Visits / Clubs & Care Club

Payments should be made preferably online through 'Teachers 2 Parents – School Money', or at a 'Paypoint' location. Alternatively, debit card payments can be taken over the telephone or at the school office between 8.00am and 4.00pm. Cash payments for school dinners are not excepted unless there are exceptional circumstances.

Parents should remain in credit where possible by at least one week for school dinners, one week for 'After School Care Club', the half-term block for extra-curricular clubs. Trips should be paid in advance 10 working days prior to the visit.

Lettings

Payments for school building 'lets' will be made via invoices from school. Invoices will be issued at the start of each term, or within 14 days of a short-term let taking place.

Agreements will be completed and signed by the school (School Business Manager - SBM) and 'lettee'. Invoices should be paid within 30 days of receipt by the lettee. The school reserves the right to apply a late payment fee.

General Requirements

The school will take all reasonable measures to vigorously collect debts as part of its management of public funds.

The school's debt recovery policy will observe the relevant financial regulations and guidance set out in the Scheme for Financing Schools and any other legal requirements.

In general payment for all goods and services supplied by the School should be collected in advance or 'at the point of sale'.

The procedures to secure the collection of all debts are outlined below and should be followed by all School staff.

Management of School Dinner Money Debts

Parents are contacted via text messages if there is insufficient credit on their account for that week on a Tuesday.

Week 1 : Dinner debt is equivalent to £12.05 (one week's outstanding dinners)

Check 1 Is this a FSM child, are dates correct?

Check 2 Is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
Be aware that payments made online may take up to 48 hours to appear on the school's account.

Check 3 Does this parent normally pay on-time, is this just a one off?

Check 4 Is the register correct? Check with the teacher/support staff

Action : 'Gentle debt reminder' via T2P text messaging system.

Week 2 : Dinner debt is equivalent to £24.10 (two week's outstanding dinners)

Final check As at Level 1 for any changes or payments made.

Action : 'Debt letter reminder' by Thursday morning informing parents/ carers of action the school will be implementing as stated in the letter.

Week 3 : Dinner debt has increased beyond £25.00 approaching £36.15.

Final check As at Level 1 for any changes or payments made.

Action : 'Debt phone call' by Thursday morning informing parents/ carers of action the school will be no longer be able to provide their child with a school dinner until the debt has been cleared, as mentioned in the letter sent in week 2
Payment plan implemented.

Week 4 : Dinner debt has remained the same, at least above £24.10. Payment plan has not been indicated.

Final check As at Level 1 for any changes or payments made.

Action : Final letter sent (HT) requesting full payment of the outstanding debts, outlining action that the school will take :

- Involve the Local Authority legal team to pursue the debt; or
- School will apply to small claims court.

Management of After School Care Club Debts

Week 1 : Care club debt is equivalent to £50 (one week's outstanding care) or £25 for incomplete week's care.

Check 1 Is the child entitled to care vouchers?
 Contact parent to ascertain delay in vouchers.

Action : 'Gentle debt reminder' via T2P text messaging system.

Week 2 : Care club debt is equivalent to £100 (two week's outstanding care) or £50 for incomplete week's care.

Final checks As per week 1. Support parent to apply for vouchers.

Action : 'Debt phone call / letter (SBM) outlining that school will withdraw the care if the debt is not cleared with 5 days. Arrange payment plan if applicable.

Week 3 : Care club debt is not reducing, no payments have been made on the payment plan.

Final checks

Action : Letter to parents (HT) outlining that school will refer the debt to the legal team at the Local Authority if the debt is not cleared by the end of the month. Care club place suspended until debt cleared.

Swimming, Trips & Educational Visits

Parents facing financial hardship can approach the school for support to pay for education visits. Parents will be encouraged to apply for Free School Meals in order to become eligible for Pupil Premium funding as this funding is used to subsidise/ pay in full for some / all visits including swimming costs depending on the financial year.

For all other parents, although a donation, full payment should be paid at least 10 days prior to the visit/ trip. Late payments may prevent the child from attending trips which are not deemed educational but enrichment. The minimum agreed contribution should be made.

Extra-Curricular / After School Clubs

Club payments should be made, where possible in advance, but at least within one week of the block of sessions starting. A place will not be given at a club if there is outstanding debt from previous club sessions. Parents will be encouraged to apply for Free School Meals in order to be eligible for Pupil Premium (PP) funding, as extra-curricular clubs do not incur a charge for children entitled to PP funding. Parents paying with through the government voucher scheme should ensure that their payment arrives into the school bank account within 10 days of the club starting.

Management of Lettings Debts

Week 1 : Contracts for the let & invoices posted.

Check 1 Issue contracts at the start of the academic year.
The letting has been booked completing the relevant paperwork.
The lettee has agreed and signed relevant paperwork.

Action : Invoices issued at the start of each term.

Week 5 : Payment from invoice has not been received.

Check 2 The lettee has received the invoice.
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Action : Send reminder invoice & contact via telephone.

Week 7 : Payment from invoice has still not been received.

Check 3 Raise an invoice to include a late payment charge.

Action : Send letter (SBM) / phone call. Arrangement payment plan if applicable OR demand payment in full.

Week 10 : Payment from invoice has still not been received, payment plan has not been met, if applicable.

Action : Suspend letting of the school facilities, until payment has been made in full. Refer the debt to the Local Authority legal team.

Monitoring and Recovery of Debts

At each meeting of the Governing Body/Finance Committee, the Head Teacher will provide Governors with details of any outstanding dinner money / care club/ lettings debt and the current position with regard to such debt.

The School does however, reserve the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal/ care club and lettings debts. School will inform the local authority and the parents that a child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

All Write-offs of outstanding debt must be approved by the Governing Body/Finance Committee following submission of details of the debt by the Head teacher together with reasons for no further action being taken.

In particular:

- the Governing Body will approve the write-off of all debts, stocks, stores and surplus assets all such write-offs will be recorded in the minutes of the governing body;
- a formal record of any debts written off will be maintained and this will be retained for 7 years (the form of this record is specified below);
- the school will seek the advice of the Council's Legal Services Section should they consider taking legal or other action to recover the debt.

APPENDIX 1

Avenue Primary School Debt Policy

In April 2018 Avenue Primary School adopted a strict maximum debt of no more than one weeks' worth of dinners, after school club or one trip. (Trips must be paid in advance of the deadline) policy relating to the after school club, and school lunch services. In addition to this the school will adopt a final line of payment must be made in advance only for after school care clubs, and will also include educational visits and extra-curricular clubs.

- 1 Dinner Debt maximum allowance of one weeks dinners.
- 2 Extended school activities – must be paid in advance of the club taking place.
- 3 After school care club - maximum allowance of one weeks bookings. Please notify the school if payment may be made by voucher.
- 4 If parents believe that their children 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 apply for it if you qualify.

To be eligible for Free School Meals you must be in receipt of one of the following Benefits:

Income Support

Income Related Jobseekers Allowance or Income Related Employment Support Allowance

The guaranteed element of Pension Credit

Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

Child Tax Credit – Without Working Tax Credit

Please note that unfortunately those who are in receipt of Working Tax Credit are NOT entitled to Free School Meals.

If parents decide to use any of the chargeable services offered by the school and they are not exempt from those charges parent/s must pay in advance.

Methods of payment include:

Online using Teachers2parents (School Money) – **this is our preferred method**

In exceptional circumstances we may accept payment by debit/credit card via the school office.

If a debt is incurred and 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, a member of staff will phone the parent to ask them to come to school with the money or ask them to pay online immediately; otherwise they must provide sandwiches before lunch time.

If payment of the debt is not received, by the next day, the school reserves the right to begin formal proceedings against parents to recover the debt.

Please remember to let the school office know in good time if you wish to make any changes to your child's lunch arrangements.

The same principles apply to the other services provided by the school and the school reserves the right to stop attendance at clubs or refuse access to After School care or other services where fees remain unpaid.

We hope that by implementing this debt policy we are able to help parents manage payments better and at the same time ensure that funds allocated for children's learning is available for every child.

If you have any concerns please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Louise Underwood', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mrs Louise Underwood
Head Teacher

APPENDIX 2

Reminder 1 - Sent home with child

Date

Parent/Carer of
Leicester

Dear Parent/Carer

Re:

According to our records, it appears that there is balance for the following;

- Dinner
- After School Care Club
- Trip(s) *delete as appropriate* money outstanding for your child(ren).

The full amount due for payment is £0000.

We would be grateful if you would kindly clear this balance as soon as possible.

If you have any query or difficulty with payment of this amount, please let us know and we will endeavour to help.

Thank you for your co-operation in this matter.

Yours sincerely

Beverley Hughes
School Business Manager

APPENDIX 3

Reminder 2 - Send in post

Parent/Carer of
Address Line 1
Address Line 2
Post Code

Date

Dear Parent/Carer

Re:

According to our records, it appears that there is balance for dinner / before / aftercare / trips *delete as appropriate* money outstanding for your child. The amount due for payment is £0000. We would be grateful if you would kindly clear this balance as soon as possible.

If you have any query or difficulty with payment of this amount, please let us know and we will endeavour to help.

Please note no further meals can be provided until the outstanding debt is paid. *delete if appropriate*

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately. You have 2 ways to pay:

1. In the secure online payment system Teachers2Parents (School Money) using the login previously provided NB: THIS IS OUR PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD
2. Contact the school office to make a payment over the telephone.

Thank you for your co-operation in this matter.

Yours sincerely

B. Hughes
School Business Manager

APPENDIX 4

Reminder 3 – Sent “signed for” post

Parent or carer of A
Parent/Carer of
Address Line 1
Address Line 2
Post Code

Date

FINAL REMINDER

Our records show that you have not paid the outstanding balance for your child despite three previous reminders, text message, a telephone call and a letter from our administration team.

As at date your account is showing a debt of £.....

Sending reminders and calling parents to chase payments takes up valuable time and resources. Parents who are experiencing difficulty with payment or who are eligible for Free School Meals for this academic year and have not already applied should contact the school office immediately.

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately or, if you are unable to pay immediately, please contact the school office to arrange a payment plan otherwise the school will begin formal proceeding to recover the debt through the Local Authority legal team.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately.

Yours sincerely

L. Underwood
Head Teacher