



# Oughtibridge Primary School

## Debt Recovery Policy (including school meals)

### Policy Statement

The Oughtibridge Primary School Debt Recovery Policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners. We aim to maintain positive relationships with families at all times. This policy aims to minimise any embarrassment created by any unpaid debt and sets out processes and procedures that minimise the amount of time spent by school staff pursuing unpaid debt. As the Local Authority is no longer accountable for the administration of dinner money debt the responsibility now falls on the school to pursue instances of non-payment. As a result the school budget will have to directly fund any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered thereby directly affecting the amount of money that is available to provide education to all pupils.

The Schools Meals Service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for and it is the responsibility of parents/carers to ensure that payments are made in good time.

Parents who meet certain criteria may qualify for Free School Meals. 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 Sheffield City Council

Website: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/education/information-for-parentscarers/at-school/school-meals/free-school-meals>

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

### Payment for School Meals

Payment for school meals must be made at the beginning of the week the meals are required and can be made weekly, fortnightly, monthly or when the account becomes nearing zero. Payment can be made using our online payment system, SIMs Agora or by cheque (payable to Sheffield City Council) or cash. When parents/carers log onto SIMs Agora they can easily see the balance of their account. SIMs Agora provides a facility which you can subscribe to which will remind you if your balance becomes low. We encourage you to use this facility.

### Management of School Meal Debts

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 contact the parent/carer in the first instance to establish if alternative arrangements have been made.

If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a note detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting immediate payment.

Where a child continues to take unpaid meals, the school may try to 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 School Business Manager.

It is the responsibility of the School Clerk and School Business Manager to ensure that all dinner money debt is monitored on a weekly basis. Parents should receive standard letters on a weekly basis followed by personalised letters at week 3, 4 and 5 warning that no further meals will be provided by the school until the debt has been paid. No debt should exceed £50 per child at any time.

If any debt exceeds £50, and/or action proves unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, the school will inform our Safeguarding Team and 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.

### **Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts**

The Headteacher may 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 may refer any unpaid debts to SCC debt collection service and reserves 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 lunch time. Any debt recovery charges incurred by the school will be added to the overall outstanding debt.

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

### **Management of debt to the school (not school meal debt)**

The monitoring of any outstanding payments for trips will be undertaken by the School Clerk and School Business Manager at least 2 weeks before any trip or visit is to take place or prior to any deposits being paid in the case of residential trips. Payment will be requested via a telephone call to the parent. If signed permission forms have been received with no payment this will be discussed with the Headteacher where a decision can be made as to whether the child can participate in the activity.

This policy has been agreed and adopted by the governing body:

Date: September 2018

Headteacher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Chair of Governor's signature: \_\_\_\_\_