

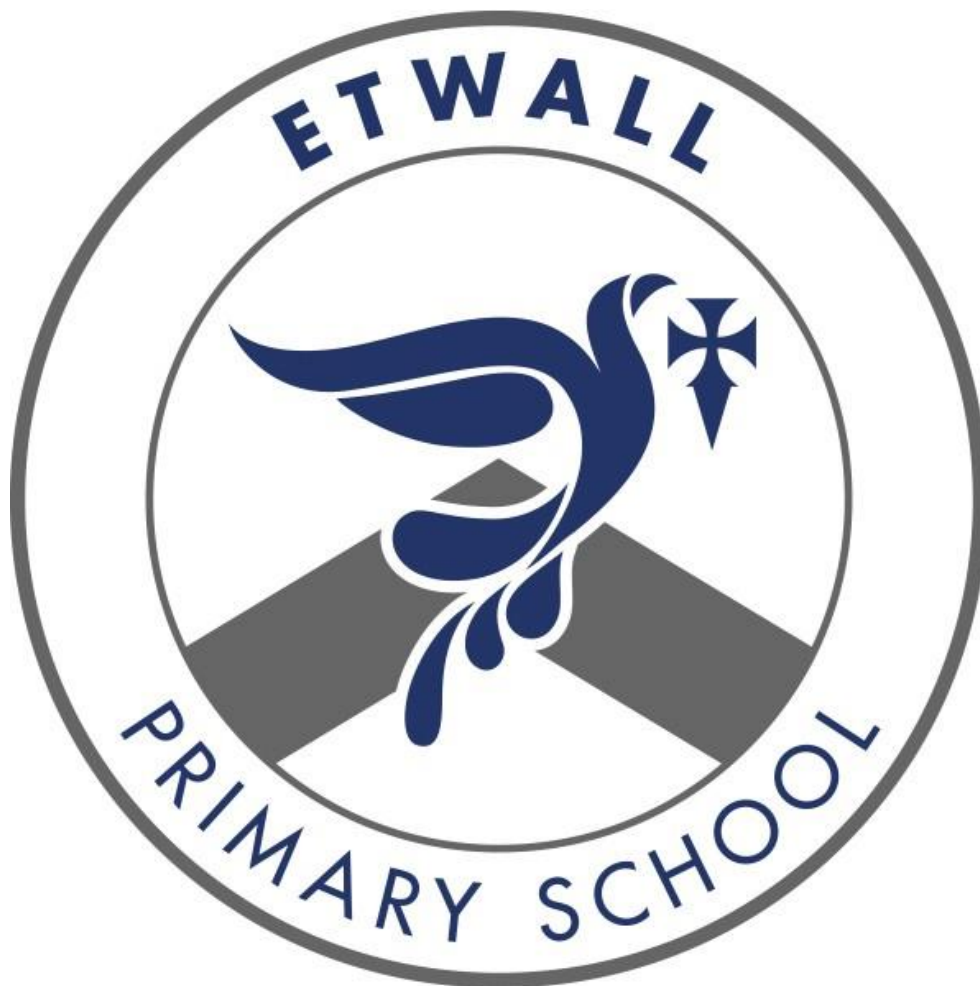


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Author:	Sarah Bentley	Minute number	16/23-24/JJ
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Signed by Chair of Governors		Signed by Headteacher	
This policy has been reviewed on 23/07/2023 and has been impact assessed in the light of all other school policies and the Equality Act 2010.			



Etwall Primary School

Dinner Money Policy

Background

The Etwall 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. As the Local Education 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.

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 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 Derbyshire County Council's website:

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your-child-at-school/meals/school-meals/free-school-meals.aspx>

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.

Cost of School Meals

School meals are available to children at a cost of £3.25 per day or at no cost to those in receipt of Free School Meals entitlement. 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 if that information is received in school early enough.

Payment for School Meals

Please pay for all school dinners using ParentPay. Each parent or carer is able to have their own account so dinner money can be paid by more than one person. ParentPay accounts are set up by the school office when your child joins Etwall Primary School. All payment should be received in advance. Parents should contact the office if there are any difficulties with their account.

UIFSM

Under a previous government, Universal Infant Free School Meals were introduced, allowing all children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 to receive a free hot dinner

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 consider the fairest system to all families is to pursue a 'Zero Tolerance' approach. 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 takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a quick debt reminder message will be sent to parent via ParentPay on day meal is taken.

At the end of the week if a child is still owing dinner money of less than 5 school meals, a ParentPay Gentle debt reminder message will be sent via ParentPay.

Where a child continues to require meals and payment has not been made, the school must ring or speak to the parent 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 Head Teacher.

When the debt exceeds the cost of 5 school meals for a child or 10 school meals per family, a formal letter must be sent to the parent/carer informing them to provide their child/children with a packed lunch to prevent further arrears (*letter 1*). *A school meal will continue to be provided should a packed lunch not be sent and contact made with the parent to ensure that they have received the letter and are taking steps to clear the debt.*

If no attempts have been made to clear debt and debt exceeds the cost of 15 school meals then Letter 2 will be issued.

If the debt exceeds the cost of 15 school meals 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 (*letter 2*). *The school should also make contact with the family offering Early Help Support and a referral to other agencies, if appropriate.*

A school meal of a sandwich, a piece of fruit and a drink of water will be provided until it can be established that the parent has received the letter.

Separated Parents

If parents are separated and there is a dinner money debt, both parents will be informed about the amount owed, that packed lunches should be provided if the balance owed is more than the cost of 5 school meals and that school meals will not be provided if the debt exceeds the cost of 15 school meals. If parents wish for the child to continue to receive a school meal, they must begin paying for the meal and may need to recover the owed money from the other parent themselves. The school are unable to mediate between parents under these circumstances.

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts

At each meeting of the Finance and 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 and inform the local authority that a child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunchtime.

All write-offs of outstanding debt must be approved by the Finance and Resources Committee following submission of details of the debt by the Head Teacher together with reasons for no further action being taken.

Appendix 1

ParentPay Quick Reminder Message (To be sent using ParentPay system)

Dear

I am writing to remind you that according to our records, you have arrears on your child's ParentPay account.

Our records show that as of xxxxx, your outstanding balance for School Meals for Etwall Primary School is -£xxx for your child xxxx.

We would appreciate it if you could arrange for this to be paid immediately. You can make payment by logging into ParentPay.

Your username and password are:

User Name xxxxxxxx Password Changed by user

You can check your account balance at anytime by logging into your ParentPay account. You also have the option to use the Auto top-up feature for school meals which will automatically top up your child's lunch balance when it falls below a set value.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or if you have difficulty making payment please contact the school office to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Appendix 2

ParentPay Gentle Debt reminder (To be sent using ParentPay system)

Dear [miscontactname]

Pupil: [consumersurname] Class: [class]

I am writing to remind you that according to our records, you have arrears on your child's dinner money account. In order for your child to continue to receive school lunches it is important to keep your account in credit.

Our records show that for your child [consumersurname] Class: [class] at xxxx your debt is [balance]

Please arrange for this to be paid immediately by using ParentPay, our secure online payment system. You can use the login previously provided. Please visit www.parentpay.com

Your username and password are:

User Name xxxxxxxxxx Password Changed by user

You can check your account balance at anytime by logging into your ParentPay account.

Non-payment for school meals affects the quality of service we are able to offer to the children therefore we need to ensure that all accounts are up-to-date. Once the debt is cleared, please ensure the account remains in credit.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or if you have difficulty making payment please contact the school office to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Example – Letter 1 5 school meals to 10 school meals (per family) or first request for debt to be settled)

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)

On looking through our records in respect of dinner monies for (name of child), we note that you owe £..... for dinners.

I should be grateful if you would let us have this money as soon as possible.

If you think that you may be eligible for free school meals, the link below provides further information:

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your-child-at-school/meals/school-meals/free-school-meals.aspx>

If you wish to discuss the debt please do not hesitate to contact me as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Bentley

Headteacher

Example – Letter 2 (for debts above 15 school meals or when a reminder has already been sent)

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 financial records we have not received dinner money for *pupil name* in Class: xx since xx/xx/xx. Your account is showing an amount outstanding of £xx for meals taken up to xx/xx/xx

Please make arrangements immediately to pay the outstanding dinner money into the school office. Once you have cleared the current debt I should be grateful if you could ensure that you keep your account in credit. The current cost of a school meal is £x.xx per day or £x.xx per week. (*price as September 2023*). Any meals not taken due to illness or absence are credited to your child's account.

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.** You can apply on line, or additional information and an application form can be found on the Derbyshire County Council's website or in the school office if you do not have access to the Internet: <https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your-child-at-school/meals/school-meals/free-school-meals.aspx>

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,

Sarah Bentley
Head Teacher

Example – Letter 3

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 Class xx is still outstanding. The school's records show that as at xx/xx/xx your account is £x in debt. The current cost of a school meal is £x.xx per day or £xx.xx per week. (*price as September 2023*)

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.

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.** You can apply online or additional information and an application form can be found on the Derbyshire County Council's website or in the school office if you do not have access to the Internet: <https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your-child-at-school/meals/school-meals/free-school-meals.aspx>

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 the service provided to all pupils is maintained. Unfortunately, if the debt is not cleared by xxxxx a school meal can 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 and to inform the local authority safeguarding team that your child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

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

Yours sincerely

Sarah Bentley

Head Teacher

Debt policy implementation

Key Information

1. All parents are provided with a copy of the debt policy when their child's joins the school.
2. All school lunches 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.
4. Parents who don't want their child to have school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch or arrange to take them home for lunch.

Level 1 Daily – To all debts

Indicator

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

Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

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

Action 1: send a 'Quick debt reminder' Appendix 1

This message is already set up for us to use in ParentPay. Run it instantly in Pupils> Mail merge.

Level 2 Every Wednesday – To those who received letter previous week

Indicator: A child comes to school again without the debt being paid or a pack lunch

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

Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 3 has the parent made contact?

Action 2: Personal contact

Someone will phone the parent to ask them to either bring the balance into credit or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime.

Level 3 Every Thursday – to all debts

The parent does not comply with any of these options

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

Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 3 has the parent made contact?

Action 3: send a 'Gentle Debt reminder' Appendix 2

This message is already set up for us to use in ParentPay. Run it instantly in Pupils> Mail merge.

On a rolling three-week plan.

Level 4 Every Friday – Week one.

When the debt exceeds the cost of 5 school meals for a *child* or 10 school meals per family, and above communication attempts have been tried

Formal letter 1 must be sent

Level 5 Every Friday – Week two.

For debts above 15 school meals or when a reminder has already been sent

Formal letter 2 must be sent

Level 6 Every Friday – Week three.

When no attempts from parents have been made to pay debt. Formal letter 3 must be sent