

‘Living Life to its Fullest; Making a Difference Along the Way’

Bad Debt Policy

As from 1st September 2022, Rivington Foundation Primary School has adopted a clear NO DEBT policy relating to school meal services and Extended Services (Breakfast/After School Clubs)

The school meals and Breakfast Club service is no different to any other business and meals have to be paid for. Parents/carers should be able to relate to the situation that they cannot take their child to a restaurant e.g. McDonald’s and expect a meal without paying; the same applies at school.

If debts are incurred, then the school budget has to pay for them. This means that money which should be spent on the children’s education is used to pay for debts incurred. We request that all parents/carers and staff give this policy their full support.

The Free School Meal (FSM) system is available for parents who are in receipt of certain state benefits and any pupil till the end of year 2. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that parents use it if they qualify. Their child will then have a right to a meal each day.

It is very time consuming for the office staff to continually chase for dinner money – by letter, phone call or in person. It is also highly embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative effect on our relationships with staff and families.

The Governing Board of Rivington Foundation Primary School believes that a ‘zero-tolerance’ approach is the fairest system. We understand that it may seem a very hard stance as there has been a culture of debt tolerance. However, going forward, we are sure that all parents/carers and staff will support the school and ensure all the school budget is spent for the benefit of all our pupils.

We will ensure that parents are aware of this policy by:

- A letter to parents (appendix 1)
- Reminders in our newsletter
- The school website
- A copy of the policy in our induction pack when staff/children join the school

Payment for School Meals

Parents/carers and staff must pay in advance for school lunch by parent pay. Payment must be made on a Monday or the first day back after a half term.

No-one will be provided with a school meal unless it is paid for, except students that are entitled to free school meals. If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of one meal. However this debt must be paid by the following morning and future meals must be paid in advance before any further meal is provided.

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If a debt is not cleared, parents/carers must provide a packed lunch. In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the School Office will phone the parent/carer to ask them to come to school with the money or packed lunch before lunchtime.

If Payment Has Not Been Made - If a child or a member of staff has taken a meal which has not been paid for or has not paid a Breakfast Club invoice, the parents/carers or the member of staff will be sent a reminder text detailing how much is owed. If no payment is received, a letter will be sent (Appendix 2).

If payment is still not received a further letter will be sent detailing the consequences of non payment and a final date by which payment must be made (Appendix 3).

The school will work closely with parents/carers and staff in working out a form of payment plan to help resolve the situation.

Consequences of Non-Payment for Services

If payment of the debt is not received, the Headteacher reserves the right to begin legal proceedings through Legal Services to recover the debt. Social Services may also be informed that these parents/carers are not carrying out the responsibility of care by not providing food for their child at lunchtimes. It is not the responsibility of the school to provide lunch for pupils. It is the responsibility of the parent/carer to provide a meal, either a school lunch or a packed lunch.

Outstanding debts for school lunches, breakfast club, late stay or non-essential curricular school trips will also exclude children from attending future non-essential curricular school trips where a payment is needed for attendance.

Conclusion

We hope that by implementing this debt policy we are able to help parents/carers and staff manage their school debts effectively, reduce administration time and costs involved chasing dinner money debts and at the same time ensure that school budgets are used correctly for the education of its pupils.

Office Procedural Guide for Bad Debts Policy

At each level of escalation the following checks must be made:

Check 1: If student is the child FSM, are the dates correct?

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

Check 3: Has the person/parent made contact?

Level 1 Indicator: An account goes into debt.

Checks 1 – 3.

Does this person/parent normally pay on time, is this just a one-off?

Action for Level 1: Text reminder sent & First letter from Headteacher Appendix 2

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Level 2 Indicator: A lunch is requested again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch provided or non-payment of Breakfast Club / Late stay invoice.

Checks 1 – 3.

Action for Level 2: Personal contact

Someone will phone the parent/carer to ask them to either bring money or sandwiches to school before lunchtime.

Staff will be contacted to provide money by 10am or school lunch will not be provided.

Level 3 Indicator: Non-compliance with any of these options.

Checks 1 – 3.

Action for Level 3: Send a Second Letter, Appendix 3

The headteacher will send a final letter.

Level 4 Indicator: The parents/carers / staff member consistently do not comply with any of these options.

Checks 1 – 3.

Action for Level 4: Matter to be referred to Legal Services for Debt Collection & Social Services where appropriate

RIVINGTON FOUNDATION PRIMARY SCHOOL

GENERAL DEBT MANAGEMENT POLICY

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Governing Body is responsible for ensuring that procedures are in place for the recovery of any outstanding debt.
- 1.2 This policy sets out procedures for debt recovery and for the write-off of any debt which is deemed to be irrecoverable.

2.0 POLICY

- 2.1 Payment should be obtained as and when goods and services are provided wherever possible; in particular where the value of the goods and services is relatively small, i.e. less than £100.
- 2.2 Where payment is not received at the time when the goods or services are delivered an invoice must be raised as soon as possible but normally within 10 working days after a debt becomes due.
- 2.3 Invoices should require immediate payment.
- 2.4 Final reminders should be issued if no payment is received within 28 days. The final reminder should make it clear that legal action will be considered if payment is not received within a further 14 days.
- 2.5 At each Governing Body/Finance Committee meeting, the headteacher is required to inform the governors of any debt which is still outstanding after the 14-day period following the final reminder together with any proposed action. This may be a referral to a debt collection agency, to solicitors for legal action or to write-off the debt if there is no realistic prospect of debt recovery being successful or if further action is not cost-effective.
- 2.6 Outstanding debt of up to £200 may be written-off by the headteacher provided that the appropriate follow-up action outlined above has been taken and the details of the debtor, amount of write-off and reason for no further action being taken is reported to the Finance Committee for information at their next meeting.
- 2.7 Write-off of outstanding debt in excess of £200 must be approved by the Finance Committee following submission of details of the debt by the headteacher together with reasons for no further action being taken.

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Appendix 1- Initial letter to parents on introduction of policy

Dear Parents/Carers

Re: School Meals Debt Policy

Unfortunately due to an increase in the number of school meals that are regularly not being paid for, from 1st September 2018, Rivington Foundation Primary School, will adopt a NO DEBT policy relating to school meals and Breakfast Club fees. This is to ensure that the school budget is used for the benefit of all our pupils and efficient running of the school. Please read the attached policy for a fuller explanation of this. The school budget has to be used to clear debt incurred by parents ordering meals for their child or use of the Breakfast Club and not paying for these services. As a consequence, money, which should be spent on children’s education, is being used to fund unpaid meals and provide childcare. I am certain that you would agree this is unfair and unacceptable.

School lunches must be paid for in advance. Please pay through parent pay, on a Monday or the first day back after a half term.

Children will not be provided with a school lunch unless it is paid for, except those that are entitled to Free School Meals. If you think you are entitled to Free School Meals, please ask at the school office for a form or contact the School Meals Service in BANES to check your eligibility. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify.

If a parent/carer forgets to pay in advance for their child(ren)’s school meals, the school will contact you and grant a one-off debt allowance of one meal. However this debt must be paid the next morning at the latest and further meals for the week paid in advance. If this debt is not cleared, then you must provide your child with a packed lunch until all outstanding debts have been paid. Parents who ignore this will be contacted in the morning and asked to bring in sandwiches or the outstanding payment.

Similarly, payment for Breakfast Club / Late Stay will need to be received by the school within 1 week upon receipt of the invoice. If payment of debt is not received, the Headteacher may decide to bring legal proceedings to recover the debt. Social Services may be informed if parents/carers are not providing food for their child at lunchtime.

I would also like to highlight that should your child go home after 10.00am and you have ordered a school meal, this meal may have to be paid for as the food will have been cooked.

I am certain that by implementing this debt policy, we can help parents/carers manage school dinner money better and, at the same time, ensure that the school budget is used directly for our pupil’s education.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Annette

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Headteacher

Appendix 2- First Letter (School Meals)

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)

According to our records you have not paid dinner money for your child (pupil name) in Class: xx. As at xx/xx/xx your account is showing a debt of £xx.

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. 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 £2.20 per day.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information.

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 Annette

Headteacher

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Appendix 2- First Letter (Breakfast Club / Late Stay)

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

Breakfast Club / Late Stay Attendance Fees for (Pupil Name)

According to our records you have not paid for your child’s attendance fees at Breakfast Club for (Month). As of today’s date, your account is showing a debt of £xx.

In order that the school’s budget is not used to clear your child’s debt please make arrangements for the outstanding fees to be paid immediately. 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 Annette

Headteacher

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Appendix 3- Second Letter (School Meals)

Second Letter

Parent or carer of Xxxxx Xxxxxxx

Dear xxx

School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)

I am very concerned at the current level of debt outstanding on your "School Meal" account.

Despite previous correspondence and numerous messages the debt for 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 £2.20 per day or £11.00 per week.

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. As I feel sure that you will appreciate the school operates on a limited budget therefore, to enable us to provide for the welfare of the children, excellent facilities at the highest level possible, then strict financial control is essential.

This situation cannot be allowed to continue and I would ask you to please make arrangements to clear this debt immediately and take steps to ensure your account is kept in credit in the future.

Unfortunately, if the debt is not cleared by xxxxx a school meal will no longer be provided for your child and you must make your own arrangements for your child's lunch. We are happy to discuss arrangements for a payment plan if this would be helpful. This outstanding debt will also exclude your child from breakfast club, late stay or attending future non-essential curricular trips.

I very much regret that if you do not take steps to resolve the position without delay then the school will have no alternative but to begin legal proceedings to recover the outstanding debt together with all costs involved and to inform the local authority that your child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, the method of payment or require information regarding the procedure for the payment of school meals then please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Annette

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Headteacher

Appendix 3- Second Letter (Breakfast Club/late stay)

Second Letter

Parent or carer of Xxxxx Xxxxxxx

Dear xxx

Breakfast Club/ Late Stay Attendance Fees for (Pupil Name)

I am very concerned at the current level of debt outstanding on your "Breakfast Club" account. Despite previous correspondence and numerous messages the debt for xx in Class xx is still outstanding. The School's records show that as at xx/xx/xx your account is £x in debt.

As the School has to fund all 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. As I feel sure that you will appreciate the school operates on a limited budget therefore, to enable us to provide for the welfare of the children, excellent facilities at the highest level possible, then strict financial control is essential.

This situation cannot be allowed to continue and I would ask you to please make arrangements to clear this debt immediately and take steps to ensure your account is kept in credit in the future.

Unfortunately, if the debt is not cleared by xxxxx, we will no longer be able to offer the services of the Breakfast Club to your child. Also outstanding debts will exclude your child from non-essential curricular trips. We are happy to discuss arrangements for a payment plan if this would be helpful.


I very much regret that if you do not take steps to resolve the position without delay then the school will have no alternative but to begin legal proceedings to recover the outstanding debt together with all costs involved.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, the method of payment or require information regarding the procedure for the payment then please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Annette

Headteacher



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Approved by Governors: July 2019

To be reviewed: September 2022