

Bad Debt Procedure

As from September 2019, The Consortium Trust has adopted clear procedures relating to parent/carer/third party debts. If debts are incurred, then the school/nursery 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 by parents. The Trust wants to support our parents and this includes preventing large debts accumulating.

Every parent will agree that it is unacceptable for funds to be diverted away from teaching and learning to cover any debts which are allowed to accrue and we request that all parents give these procedures their full support. 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 use it if you qualify as it can also lead to additional support in other educational areas. We will help you all we can with your application.

All payments to school/nursery should be made using the Arbor online payment system. It is the Trust aim to be cashless as this will reduce administrative time, especially as many schools are in rural areas with no facilities to bank cash and cheques. A great deal of time is currently spent chasing parent payments which is time that our admin team could be spending supporting the Academy Heads with the educational focus of the school. All school meals, nursery sessions, Breakfast and After school clubs, Extra-curricular clubs, Residential visits, Educational visits can be paid through the online system and payment must be made in advance at the time of booking. All meals and sessions must be booked in advance to ensure an accurate register for clubs is available to staff and that adequate staff are in attendance.

School meals will not be provided unless they are paid for in advance, except those that are entitled to free school meals. If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of 5 meals - £11.50. However this debt must be paid by the end of that week and future meals must be paid in advanced before any further meals are provided.

If the debt is not cleared, parents must either provide a packed lunch or take the child home for lunch. In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the Academy Head will phone the parent to request immediate payment. Otherwise they must provide sandwiches before lunch time or arrange to take their child home for lunch.

If a child attends nursery or a club without prior booking, staff have the right to refuse entry if they feel that there is not sufficient staffing to create a safe environment for the pupils present. If the pupil does remain, then the parent must make payment immediately. All debts must be made by the end of the week otherwise the school will refuse entry to nursery and clubs until the debt is cleared.

If payment of the debt is not received by the end of the week, the Academy Head shall inform the Trust Head of Service Finance who will write to the parent. It is imperative that parents communicate with the school if financial difficulties are being experienced. We are here to support our pupils and their families and our Head of Service Welfare, Inclusion, Safeguarding and Attendance can offer that support.

We hope that by implementing this debt procedure we are able to help parents manage payments to school and at the same time ensure that all money that is intended for children's learning is available.

Establishing a debt procedure

The Consortium will ensure that parents are aware of this procedure in the following ways:

- *A letter to parents*
- *The school's newsletter*
- *The school brochure*
- *The school website*
- *The Trust website*

This will ensure that all parents get the same message in a consistent way. This should be done at least once each year, more often when it is first introduced. All parents should be provided with a copy of the procedure when their child joins the school.

Debt procedure implementation - Key Information:

1. *All parents are provided with a copy of the debt procedure when their child joins the school.*
2. *All school lunches, nursery session and clubs must be paid for in advance.*
3. *Pupils should not be sent to school and expect to be given a meal if payment has not been made in advance. The school will not allow a pupil to go hungry but they will not be given a hot meal. Toast or cereal and fruit will be provided instead.*
4. *Parents, who don't want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch or arrange to take them home for lunch.*

Level 1 Indicator: A child's record shows a debt:

1. **Check 1: Is this a FSM child, are dates correct?**
2. **Check 2: Is there a possibility that payments have not been recorded correctly?**
3. **Check 3: Does this parent normally pay on time; is this just a one off?**

Action 1: Send a 'Gentle debt reminder' - Appendix A

Level 2 Indicator: A child comes to school again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch.

1. **Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?**
2. **Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been recorded correctly?**
3. **Check 3 has this parent made contact?**

Action 2: Personal contact

Someone will phone the parent to ask them to make immediate payment online or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime or arrange to take their child home at lunchtime.

Level 3 Indicator: The parent does not comply with any of the above options.

1. **Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?**
2. **Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been recorded correctly?**
3. **Check 3 has this parent made contact?**

Action 3: Send Strong debt letter - Appendix B

Level 4 Indicator: The parent consistently does not comply with any of these options.

1. **Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?**
2. **Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been recorded?**
3. **Check 3 has this parent made contact?**

Action 4: Notify HoSWISA and Trust HoS Finance Level 5 - Trust CFO to refer to the Trust Board who will evaluate each case individually and consider a range of options.



28 February 2023

APPENDIX A

Gentle Debt Reminder

[INSERT SCHOOL LOGO]

Parent or carer of xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx Xxxxxxxxxxxxxx
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX XXXXXXXX XXXXX xx/xx/xxxx

DATE

Child XXXXX

Class XXXXXXXX

This is a reminder that, according to our records, you have arrears on your child's dinner money/nursery/ club account. Our records show that as at xx/xx/xxxx there is a debt of £xx.xx Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately by Arbor.

NOTE: All meals/clubs MUST be paid for in advance in accordance with the Trust Bad debt procedures.

If you don't wish for your child to have a school meal, please provide them with a healthy packed lunch or arrange to take them home for lunch. The cost of a school meal is £2.30 per day - £11.50 per week.

Enclosed is a Free School Meals Information leaflet for Parents and Guardians, detailing the eligibility criteria and how to apply for free school meals, or alternatively call 01473 260989(Suffolk) 01603 222518(Norfolk) to check eligibility.

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

Yours sincerely

Academy Head
XXXX Primary School

APPENDIX B

Strong Debt Reminder

[INSERT SCHOOL LOGO]

Parent or carer of xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxx xx/xx/xxxx

DATE

Child xxxxxxxx

Class xxxxxxxx

This is a reminder that, according to our records, you have arrears on your child's dinner money/nursery/ club account. Despite a previous written reminder and a telephone call our records show that at xx/xx/xxxx your debt is £xx.xx

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately via Arbor. The cost of a school meal is £2.30 per day - £11.50 per week.

Your debt has already been outstanding for more than 7 days. We would therefore ask you to make immediate payment. If you are unable to do so please provide your child with a packed lunch until your account has been settled.

In the event of payment not being received, your debt will be referred to the Trust to decide what further action should be taken to recover the debt.

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

Yours sincerely

Academy Head
xxx Primary School