

# CASTLECHURCH PRIMARY SCHOOL

## School Debt Policy



Effective 1st September 2020, Castlechurch Primary School has adopted a minimum debt policy relating to school meals and Extended Services such as before/after school clubs and extended nursery provision.

These services are no different to any other business and if debts are incurred then the school budget has to pay for them until such point the debts are recovered. This means that money which should be spent on the children's education is used to pay for debts incurred instead. 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. If a parent/carer thinks they may qualify for FSM entitlement, they should contact the school office for further details. 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 free school meal each school day, term time only.

All pupils in years Reception, 1 and 2 are also automatically entitled to a Free School Meal under the current Government initiative, 'Universal Free School Meals'.

It is the responsibility of the members of office staff to communicate with parents/carers in regards to outstanding money, by letter, text message, phone call, email or in person. It can often be time consuming and embarrassing for all concerned and can have a negative effect on our relationships with staff and families/carers. Therefore, we will ensure that all staff are given a copy of this policy and that parents/carers 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 children join the school
- Reminders of ways available to pay for services (e.g. Parent Pay, Childcare Vouchers Scheme)

## **Payment for School Meals**

Parents/carers and staff must pay promptly using our cashless online payment system 'ParentPay' for school meals. The cost of the meals will be published in the school newsletter at regular intervals.

No-one will be provided with a school meal unless it is paid for in advance, except students that are entitled to universal free school meals or hold FSM status. The school will grant a maximum debt allowance of £20, however all outstanding debt, including that below this figure, must be paid for in full within two weeks of using the provision.

If a debt remains unpaid, parents/carers must provide a packed lunch. If your account is in debt (i.e. past the maximum allowed period as stated above) you will receive a letter requesting payment. If the request for payment remains unacknowledged and no payment received, a second letter will be sent informing you of the removal of the school meals provision and thereafter you will be required to provide your child with a packed lunch until the debt is cleared in full.

If a packed lunch is not provided following removal of school meals, the school will inform the necessary agencies that these parents/carers are not fulfilling their parental responsibility 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.

If a debt is not cleared by a member of staff, the school meal provision will be removed until full payment is made.

## **Payment for Extended Services (Before/After School Clubs and Extended Nursery provision)**

Parents/carers must pay promptly on ParentPay (or other previously agreed payment methods) for Before/After School Clubs and Extended Nursery provision.

No-one will be provided with an Extended Service place without payment being made in advance in full by the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month, except for students that are entitled to receive free funded provision (15 hours Nursery Government funded provision).

If a debt is not cleared, parents/carers will be unable to book places for Extended Services. If your account is in debt you will receive a letter requesting payment. If payment is not received, a second letter will be issued informing you of the removal of the provision.

## **Consequences of Non Payment for Services**

If payment of a debt is not received, the Headteacher reserves the right to issue an invoice for the debt and if this remains unpaid, to begin legal proceedings to recover the debt.

## **Conclusion**

We hope that by implementing this School Debt Policy we are able to help parents/carers and staff to manage the services provided by school effectively to avoid debts accruing, to reduce administration time and costs involved in chasing debts and to ensure that the school budget is used correctly for the education of all pupils.

### **Office Procedural Guide for Bad Debts Policy**

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

Check 1: 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/carer made contact?

**Level 1 Indicator:** An account goes into debt.

Checks 1 – 3.

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

**for Level 1: First letter Appendix 2**

**Level 2 Indicator:** Non-compliance.

Checks 1 – 3.

**Action for Level 2: Send a Second Letter, Appendix 3**

**Level 3 Indicator:** The parent/carer/staff member consistently does not comply with any of these options.

Checks 1 – 3.

**Action for Level 3: invoice raised and legal proceedings considered**

***Appendix 1- Initial letter to parents on introduction of policy***

Dear Parents/Carers

**Re: School Debt Policy**

During your child's time at school there may be occasions where payment is required for items such as school lunches, class visits or extra-curricular activities such as after school clubs. We would like to thank the majority of our parents who support school and ensure that any requests for payment are made promptly.

Unfortunately due to an increase in the number of school meals and Extended Services (Before/After School Clubs and Extended Nursery provision) that are regularly not being paid for in a timely manner, from the start of September 2020 we will adopt a minimum debt policy relating to school meals and Extended Services. This is to ensure that the school budget is used for the benefit of all our pupils and for the efficient running of the school. Please read the attached policy for a fuller explanation of this.

The school budget has had to be used to clear debt incurred by parents/carers. As a consequence, money, which should be spent on children's education, is being used to fund unpaid meals and to provide childcare and activity clubs. I am certain that you would agree this is unfair and unacceptable.

School lunches must be paid for promptly using ParentPay. Non-payment will result in the removal of the school lunch provision, except for those that are entitled to Free School Meals under the Government initiative 'Universal Free School Meals for Reception, Y1 and Y2 and those pupils who hold FSM status. If you think you are entitled to Free School Meals, please ask at the school office for details of the application process. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify.

If a school meal debt is not cleared, then you must provide your child with a packed lunch until the debt has been cleared in full. Parents/carers who ignore this will be asked to bring in a packed lunch.

Similarly, payment for Extended Services (Before/After School Clubs and Extended Nursery provision) must be paid for promptly using ParentPay. Again, non-payment will result in the removal of these provisions.

I am certain that by implementing this adverse debt policy we can help parents/carers manage school meals and Extended Services 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,

Mrs Reynolds

***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 school meal 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 school meal debt to be paid immediately. The current cost of a school meal is £xx per day or £xx per week.

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

***Appendix 2- First Letter (Extended Services)***

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

**Date: XX/XX/XX**

Dear xxx

**XXXXXX Club Attendance Fees for (Pupil Name)**

According to our records you have not paid for your child's attendance fees at XXXXXXXX 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

**Appendix 3- Second Letter (School Meals)**

**Second Letter**

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

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 the debt for xx in Class xx is still outstanding. The School's records show that as at xx/xx/xx your account is £xx in debt. The current cost of a school meal is £xx per day or £xx per week.

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

I ask you to please make arrangements to clear this debt immediately.

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. If you are experiencing financial difficulties and would like to discuss the potential of a payment plan, please contact us.

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, please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely

**Appendix 3- Second Letter (Extended School )**

**Second Letter**

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

Dear xxx

**XXXXXX Club Attendance Fees for (Pupil Name)**

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

As the school has to fund all Extended Services 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 you will appreciate that the school operates on a limited budget, to enable us to provide for the welfare of the children and for facilities at the highest level possible, strict financial control is essential.

I ask you to please make arrangements to clear this debt immediately.

Unfortunately, if the debt is not cleared by xxxxx we will no longer be able to offer the services of the XXXXXX Club to your child. We are happy to discuss arrangements for a payment plan if this would be helpful.

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

Yours sincerely