



# WALTON ON THE NAZE PRIMARY SCHOOL

## BAD DEBTS POLICY

Choose your dream and chase it!

Review date	Spring 2021
Approved date	Spring 2020
Responsible committee	Finance Committee

## **Bad Debt Policy**

As from 1st April 2019, Walton on the Naze 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. If a parent thinks they may qualify for FSM entitlement, they should contact the school office for further details or contact the Essex School Meals Services via their website:

<https://www.essex.gov.uk/Education-Schools/Schools/Pupil-Parent-Support/Pages/Healthy-Living-School-Meals.aspx>

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 text, letter, phone call or in person. It is also highly embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative effect on the relationships between staff and families.

The Governing Body of Walton on the Naze 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 in the past. 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 or on the day for school dinner by sending in cash or cheque (made payable to Walton on the Naze Primary School) in a marked envelope.

Payment for Breakfast Club must be made during the first week 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 or on the day, 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.

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 before dinnertime, bring a packed lunch or asked them to take their child home to give them their lunch.

**If Payment Has Not Been Made** - If a child or a member of staff has taken a meal which has not been paid for, 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 within seven working days 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.

**Payment for Breakfast Club** Parents will be sent a text during the first week back informing them of the amount they need to pay for the half term. Payment must be made within one week of the text being sent out and can be paid in cash or cheque, placed in a marked sealed envelope. Refunds cannot be issued if a child is ill or does not attend on a day they are due to attend breakfast club, as staffing arrangements will have been made in advance and costs will still be incurred. Your place will only be secure provided you continue to make payments in advance for each half term. Failure to pay for the place (including cheque payments returned as unpaid) will result in your child's place being forfeited. You must give a full week's written notice if you no longer require the service. The fee includes the cost of food; however there is no discount for those children who choose not to have breakfast.

### **Consequences of Non Payment for School Dinners**

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

### **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.

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

Check 1: If staff, were they on duty? If pupil, 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**

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

Checks 1 - 3.

**Action for Level 2: Personal contact**

Someone will phone the parent/carer to ask them to either bring money or packed lunch to school before dinnertime.

Staff will be contacted to provide money by 10am or school dinner 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 Care where appropriate**

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

Dear Parents/Carers

**Re: School Meals and Breakfast Club Debt Policy**

Unfortunately due to an increase in the number of school meals that are regularly not being paid for, from 1st April 2019, Walton on the Naze 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 dinners must be paid for in advance or on the day. Please send either cash or a cheque, made payable to Walton on the Naze Primary School in a sealed envelope marked with your child's name. This payment should be handed to the School Office or by your child to their teacher first thing on a morning.

Children will not be provided with a school dinner 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 contact Essex Free School Meals 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 or on the day. 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 the outstanding payment, a packed lunch or asked to take their child home for lunch.

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

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,

Mrs Bliss, Headteacher

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 you owe £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 £2.10 per day or £10.50 per week.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information. Additional information and an application form can be found at

<https://www.essex.gov.uk/Education-Schools/Schools/Pupil-Parent-Support/Pages/Healthy-Living-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  
Mrs Bliss  
Headteacher

*Appendix 2- First Letter (Breakfast Club)*

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

**Date:** XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

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

According to our records you have not paid for your child's attendance fees at Breakfast Club for (*half term*). As of today's date, you owe the sum 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

Mrs Bliss  
Headteacher

*Appendix 3- Second Letter (School Meals)*

## **Second Letter**

Parent or carer of Xxxxxx Xxxxxxxx

Dear xxx

### **School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)**

I am very concerned at the current level of debt outstanding for your child(ren)'s school dinners.

Despite previous correspondence and numerous messages the outstanding dinner money for (*pupil name*) 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 £2.10 per day or £10.50 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 (*date*) a school meal will no longer be provided for your child and you must make your own arrangements for your child's dinner. 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 and to inform the local authority that your child is not being provided with a suitable meal at dinner time.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information. Additional information and an application form can be found at

<https://www.essex.gov.uk/Education-Schools/Schools/Pupil-Parent-Support/Pages/Healthy-Living-School-Meals.aspx>

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

Mrs Bliss  
Headteacher

## **Second Letter**

Parent or carer of Xxxxxx Xxxxxxx

Dear xxx

### **Breakfast Club Attendance Fees for (Pupil Name)**

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

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. 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 Governing Body 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 of school meals then please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Bliss

Headteacher