

## MARY DEAN'S C.of E. PRIMARY SCHOOL

### **School Meals Debt Recovery Policy**

This policy has been written to help our School adopt a consistent approach to debt incurred by parents whose children take school dinners. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

The Free School Meals system is there for parents of children of all ages to claim if they are in receipt of certain benefits; information is available from the school office or [Plymouth City Council's website](#).

Also, all pupils in the Reception classes and Key Stage 1 are now entitled to receive Universal Infant Free School Meals.

**Therefore, this policy only relates to pupils in Nursery/Pre-School and Key Stage 2 (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) whose parents pay for school meals.**

The School wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals which they then find difficult to clear.

There will occasionally be the decision to be made by the School about whether a child should be refused a meal in school if they have not paid.

Parents should be able to relate to the situation that they cannot take their child to well-known high street restaurants and expect them to be given food without paying. Yet a minority of parents in the School expect us to provide food for their children without paying for it.

It is very time consuming for the School's office staff to continually chase parents for payment - by txt message, letter, phone call or in person. It is also highly embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative affect on our relationships with families.

The Governors at Mary Dean's C. of E. Primary School feel that a system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach. We understand that it may seem a very hard stance as there has been a country-wide culture of debt tolerance. However, it will become easy to maintain once parents realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for FSM or UIFSM entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for. Our School Money online cash collection system highlights debt immediately so keeping track is easy.

The School will make parents aware of this policy in the following ways:

- A letter to parents;
- Reminders in the School's newsletter;
- The School website.

This will ensure that all parents get the same message in a consistent way. This will be done at least once each year.

All parents will be made aware of the policy when their child joins the School.

## Key Information

1. All parents are made aware of the debt policy when their child 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. Where a debt has accrued, **after 5 days**, parents will be asked to provide packed lunches from home until the debt has been cleared
5. Parents who do not want their child to have a school meal should provide a healthy packed lunch

## Debt Recovery policy implementation

### Day 1

Indicator: A child's account goes into debt:

Check 1 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited online?

Check 2 does this parent normally pay on time - is this just a one off?

### Action 1: Reminder

- Send a 'gentle debt reminder text' on the first day.

### Day 2

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

Check 1 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 2 has this parent made contact?

### Action 2: Personal contact

- E.g. Phone the parent to ask them to pay online / via Pay Point / bring a credit/debit card into school or bring a packed lunch in before lunchtime.

### Day 3

Indicator: The parent does not comply with any of these options,;

Check 1 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 2 has this parent made contact?

### Action 3: School action

- The office will generate a letter through the School Money system reminding the parent about meal payment.

### Day 5

Indicator: The parent consistently does not comply with any of these options,

Check 1 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 2 has this parent made contact?

Action 4: bring in outside agencies (after time to comply with instructions)

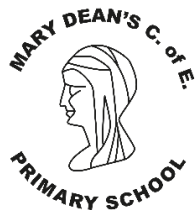
- The Headteacher will send a strongly worded letter.
- A payment plan may be agreed with the school to recoup the debt

*If this continues to be ineffective*

- Involve the Education Welfare Officer in liaison with the parent, if relevant,
- Refuse further school meals until the debt has been cleared
- Refer to Plymouth City Council to raise Debtor invoice – which will then follow the Council's debt recovery process.

**NB:**

*This current process allows five days before hitting your proposed actions on day 5, so discussions with the school to recharge for any meals taken by the pupil whilst debt recovery by the school is taking place occur so as not to allow any pupil not to receive a school lunch, this may be to either continue with a hot meal or alternatively a packed lunch style offer.*



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Dear Parents and Carers,

### School Meals Debt Recovery Policy

Due to an increase in the number of school meals that are regularly not being paid for, Mary Dean's C. of E. Primary School has adopted a NO DEBT policy relating to school meals.

We hope that all parents will give this policy their full support. As we all know, nobody takes their child to well-known high street restaurants and expect them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school. If debts are not cleared, they would ultimately have to be referred to Plymouth City Council for recovery through their debt recovery system.

If you believe that you 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. We will help you all we can with your application.

Also, all pupils in the Reception classes and Key Stage 1 are now entitled to receive Universal Infant Free School Meals.

**Therefore, this policy relates to pupils in Nursery/Pre-School and Key Stage 2 (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) whose parents pay for school meals.**

The School wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals which they then find difficult to clear.

School meals must be paid for in advance using any of the methods of payment outlined below:

- Online at [www.schoolmoney.co.uk](http://www.schoolmoney.co.uk)
- PayPoint bar code
- In the school office using a credit or debit card

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 the next day and future meals must be paid in advanced before any meal is provided.

If the debt is not cleared, parents must provide a packed lunch. In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the office will phone the parent to ask them to come to School with their credit or debit card or provide a packed lunch before lunchtime.

If payment of the debt is not received by two weeks, I reserve the right to inform the Chair of the Governors' who may decide to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt. The School's Education Welfare Officer and Children's Social Care Services may also be informed that these parents are not carrying out their responsibility of care by not providing food for their children at lunchtime.

By implementing this debt policy we are aiming to help parents manage school dinner money better.

If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Mrs T Jones  
Headteacher

