



School Meals Debt Policy

This policy has been written to help Becket Primary School adopt a consistent approach to debt that is fair for all families. It provides clarity and consistency in managing debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

There have been many discussions around whether a child should be refused a meal in school if they have not paid. However the school meals service is no different than any other business and the meals must be paid for by someone. The Free School Meals system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals, there should be no excuses for non-payment. Applying for Free School Meals is straight forward and parents can apply online, assuming eligibility is authorised the child can take a free school meal the following school day. FSM must be applied for before the beginning of each new term (3 times across the year). Becket Primary School will support parents by sending out reminders and hosting a drop-in session where parents can apply using the school computers.

Communicating the Debt Policy

This policy has been agreed and discussed with school staff and governors. Becket Primary School will make the wider school community aware of the policy by including it in one or more of the following:

- A letter to parents (Appendix 1)
- The school's newsletter
- The school brochure
- The school 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 policy when their child joins the school.

Debt Process

Key Expectations

1. All parents are provided with a copy 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. Parents who do not 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 account goes into debt (any amount)

- Check 1 Is this a FSM child, are dates correct or has the parent applied online?
Check 2 Is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
Check 3 Does this parent normally pay on time, is this just a one off?

Action 1: send a 'Gentle debt reminder' Appendix 2 – This gives the family 7 days to pay their debt

Level 2

Indicator: A child comes to school again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch (after 7 day period)

Check 1 Is this a FSM child, are dates correct or has the parent applied online?

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

Check 3 Has this parent made contact?

Action 2: Send A 'Strong Reminder Letter' Appendix 3

The head teacher will send a final letter

Level 3

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

Check 1 Is this a FSM child, are dates correct or has the parent applied online?

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

Check 3 Has this parent made contact?

Action 3: Personal Contact

Headteacher will phone the parent to ask them to either bring money or pay online or bring a packed lunch to school before lunchtime or arrange to take their child home at lunchtime. If the parent does not answer we will provide the child with whatever food is available in school (not a hot school meal). This will then be recorded in the child's child protection records. The headteacher will continue to attempt to contact the family or speak to them directly at picking up time.

Level 4

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

Check 1 Is this a FSM child, are dates correct or have they applied online?

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

Check 3 Has this parent made contact?

Action 4: Bring in outside agencies

School will arrange a face-to-face meeting with the family. Failure to attend will mean the school has to notify Social Care who will initiate further action. Formal debt collection proceedings will begin with the agreement of the school governing body.

Appendix 1: Letter to Parents about the Policy

School Meals Debt Policy

As from XXXXXX Becket Primary School has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy relating to the school meal service.

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 by parents. Every parent will agree that this is unacceptable and we request that all parents give this policy their full support.

No parent would take their child to McDonalds and expect them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school. If parents believe that their children may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals please apply online (SEARCH: North Somerset FSM). This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. Help is available with your application either at the school office or by contacting any of the above numbers.

Parent/s must pay in advance for the school lunch online using ParentPay

Children will not be provided with a school lunch unless it is paid for, except those that are entitled to free school meals. If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance or is unable to make a payment then they will be sent a reminder letter and given 7 days to clear their debts. However this debt must be paid following 7 days and future meals must be paid in advanced before any meal is 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 head teacher will phone the parent to ask them to come to school with the money or ask them to pay online immediately. Otherwise they must provide sandwiches before lunch time or arrange to take their child home for lunch.

If payment of the debt is not received by the next day, Social services may be informed that these parents are not carrying out the responsibility of care by not providing food for their children at lunchtime.

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

If you have any concerns please don't hesitate in contacting me.

Appendix 2: 'Gentle Reminder' Letter 1

I am writing to inform you that your Parentpay Account is now in debt.

As you will know, school dinners must be paid for in advance and we cannot allow debts to build up in school. Our kitchen is run by a private company and we must pay them each month, if dinner money is not paid by our families it means that money used for teaching children has to be used to cover the costs of school meals. I am sure you will agree that this is an unacceptable use of school funds.

As we are a caring school, we understand that you may have forgotten to keep up to date with payments or have problems using Parentpay. If you are having financial difficulties these services are available locally:

- YMCA Support <https://www.ymca-sc.org/our-services/support-and-advice/>
- Christians Against Poverty (CAP) <https://capuk.org/i-want-help/our-services/cap-debt-help/debt-centre/655/weston-super-mare>
- Stepchange Debt Charity <http://www.the-finance-services.co.uk/debt/stepchange/somerset/weston-super-mare/>
- North Somerset Citizens Advice <http://www.nscab.org.uk/our-services/>
- Alliance Homes (You do not have to be an Alliance Homes tenant to access this) <https://www.alliancehomesgroup.org.uk/care-and-support-services/our-support-services/support-with-your-finances/>
- Weston Foodbank <https://westonsupermare.foodbank.org.uk/>
- Big Worle <http://www.bigworle.org.uk/>

If you have a child in your home who is under 5:

- Castle Batch and Worle Children's Centres can offer support <https://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/my-services/children-young-people-families/early-years-childcare/childrens-centres/>

If you speak to Mr Collard or Mrs Whittle we can offer you further support in accessing some of these services. For example, we can contact support services and organise transport for you to attend meetings.

We will allow you 7 days from the date of this letter to pay off your debt in full and put money into your account as advance payment. During this period your child **will be able** to have school dinners. This must be done by XXXX (+7days)

Failure to do this will result in a further letter explaining that your child will no longer be allowed to have school meals and that you should provide an alternative lunch.

Appendix 3: 'Strong' Letter 2

SCHOOL DINNER ARREARS: Final Letter

Dear

Following our previous letter, you still have not paid your school dinner debts. Therefore, your child will no longer be allowed to have a hot school meal from now on.

Please send your child in with a packed lunch. **School dinners may resume once your debt is paid off in full and your account is in credit.**

If your child comes to school without any food we will:

- Contact the child's parent or carer using the family contact details you given us so that a packed lunch can be brought into school for your child
- In the event that you or another family member are uncontactable or if you refuse to bring in a lunch for your child, then we will provide your child with whatever food is available in school (not a Hot School Dinner)

However, should we need to provide your child with food, this will become a Child Protection issue as you have not given your child suitable lunch provision. This may then be referred to Social Care.

You have been given ample opportunity to pay or to arrange a meeting with school, unfortunately you have not been able to do either of these things. Therefore, we are left without any other course of action.

This policy has been discussed and agreed by the Full Governing Body of Becket Primary School:

Signed:

Head Teacher

Chair of Governors

Date:

Date:

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