

St Matthew's CE Primary School

Debt Management Policy



ST MATTHEW'S
CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Created by:	P Langridge	Date: February 2023
Approved by:	FGB	Date:
Last reviewed on:	By S Lynton - February 2026	
Next review due by:	February 2026	

Contents

Rationale	3
Payment for School Meals	3
Free School Meals	3
Payment for Nursery Top-Up	4
Unpaid Accounts Procedure	4
Consequences of Non Payment for Services	4
Writing-off bad debts and legal action	5
Appendix 1- Initial letter to parents on introduction of policy.....	6
Appendix 2- Phone call script.....	7
Appendix 3- First Letter.....	8
Appendix 4- Second Letter.....	9

Rationale

St Matthew's CE Primary School has adopted a clear **no debt** policy relating to chargeable goods and services, such as school meals and school trips or clubs that require payment etc. Recent reports cite a decreasing birth rate in Trafford, following national trends, noting that the 2022 live birth rate was 13% lower than three years prior—the lowest in a decade and this decline looks set to continue over the next three years. Therefore it is vital that any debts are addressed by the school as soon as possible.

If debts are incurred, then money from the school budget, money that should be spent on the children's education, is used to pay for them. We therefore request that all parents/carers and staff give this policy their full support.

It is time consuming for office staff to chase outstanding payments for dinner via phone calls, letters, or in person. Occasionally, it can also have a negative effect on our relationships with staff and families. The aim of this policy is to help parents/carers and staff manage their school debts effectively, reduce administration time and ensure school budgets are used appropriately for the benefit of the children.

The Governing Board of St Matthew's CE Primary School believe that a 'zero-tolerance' approach to debt is the fairest system. Going forward, we are certain that all parents/carers and staff will support the school, allowing the full school budget to be spent and benefit all of our pupils.

We will work to ensure that all parents/carers are aware of this policy by:

- Sending an initial letter to parents (Appendix 1)
- Putting reminders on parent communication apps / the school website / newsletters
- Including a copy of the policy in our induction pack

Payment for School Meals

Parents/carers and staff must pay in advance for school lunch by Evolve. Please speak to office staff if there are any issues with on-line payment. A school meal will only be provided if it is paid for, except to children that are entitled to free school meals. If a parent fails to pay in advance, the school may grant a temporary 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.

Should the case arise where a debt payment is not received, nor a packed lunch provided, the school office will phone the parent/carer to ask them to pay online immediately or come to school with a packed lunch before lunchtime.

Free School Meals

The Free School Meal (FSM) system is available for parents who are in receipt of certain benefits. If a parent/carer thinks their child(ren) 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 meal each day.

Payment for Nursery Top-up

Parents/carers and staff must pay in advance for Nursery top-up via ParentPay. Payment should be made for the following week by each Friday at 2pm at the latest. Please speak to office staff if there are any issues with on-line payment. Additional chargeable Nursery sessions will only be provided if it they are paid for. If a parent fails to pay in advance, the school may grant a temporary debt allowance of one session. However this debt must be paid by the following morning and future sessions must be paid in advance before any further sessions are provided. If a debt is not cleared, parents/carers will not be able to send their children to any chargeable sessions.

Unpaid Accounts Procedure

At each level of escalation, the following checks must be made to reduce the likelihood of errors occurring:

- ✓ Check 1: If the debt is related to a child, is the child FSM and are the dates correct?
- ✓ Check 2: Is there a possibility that payments have not been credited to their account?
- ✓ Check 3: Has the person/parent made contact?
- ✓ Check 4: Has there been any Parent Pay activity since the last communication?

1. Where there is an unpaid account, the parent/carer will receive a phone call from the office to remind them and detailing how much is owed (Appendix 2). The Headteacher's initial letter regarding the introduction of the policy will be resent via email or parent app.
2. If no payment is received in the following 5 working days, a letter will be sent (Appendix 3).
 - a. Paid services will cease where there is an outstanding debt. Therefore, should an additional lunch be requested during this process, a member of office staff would phone the parent/carer asking them to either pay online or send a packed lunch to school before lunchtime. Parents/carers of Nursery children will be asked to collect their child before any chargeable session.
3. If payment is still not received in the following 5 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 4).
4. If necessary, the school will work closely with parents/carers and staff, especially in cases of financial hardship, to develop a payment plan to help resolve the situation.

5. Should the final date pass, a meeting will be arranged between the Headteacher and the parent/carer to discuss a payment plan.
6. Three months following the original phone call, the school will follow the procedure outlined below.

Consequences of Non Payment for Services

- If payment of debts over £25 is not received, the Headteacher and Governing Body reserve the right to begin legal proceedings.
- Children's Social Care may also be informed should the school believe parents/carers are not carrying out the responsibility of care 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 exists and payment is received in school for any other reason – the initial debt will be repaid before any credit can be made for any other payment.

Writing-off bad debts and legal action

- If the debt remains and is less than £25 the Headteacher, with the consent of the Chair of Governors, will cancel, replace, or write-off the debtor's account.
- The written-off bad debts will be reported to the governing body with full explanation of the reasons for the write-off.
- The written-off amount could be debited against the school's budget to offset any credit received when the account was first raised.
- A log will be kept of written-off debt and paid services will remain to be withdrawn until the amount is paid in full.
- It is understood that the Local Authority will not pursue any debt of less than £25.
- For debt amounts of £25-£499, the Finance, Personnel and Premises Committee will make a decision whether or not to pursue the debt through Trafford Council.
- For debt amounts exceeding £500, the Full Governing Body will make a decision whether or not to pursue the debt through Trafford Council.

Appendix 1- Initial letter to parents on introduction of policy

Dear Parents/Carers

Re: School Meals Debt Policy

Unfortunately, due to a large amount of non-payment for services such as school meals, from April 2020, St Matthew's adopted a 'no debt policy' relating to non-voluntary school payments for services such as school meals or Nursery top-up, which is in place today.

This policy is to ensure that the school budget is used for the benefit of all our pupils and efficient running of the school. Currently, the school budget would have to be used to clear debt incurred by parents/carers not paying for other school meals and other services. As a consequence, money that should be spent on children's education is being used to fund unpaid debts. I am sure you will agree that this is unacceptable and unfair.

What the policy means in practice, is that all school payments should be made in advance (at the latest by 2.00pm on Fridays for services relating to the following week) so that no account goes into debt. If there is an outstanding debt on the account, all paid services, such as school meals and chargeable Nursery sessions, will cease until the debt is cleared. A process will be in place for school to make contact with parents/carers to resolve any instances of debt quickly so services can resume. A more detailed explanation of this can be found in the Debt Management Policy 2025, located on the school website.

We will shortly be sending out statements if you currently owe school money. Please make arrangements to clear any debt that is currently on your account within ten days of the date on this letter. Should you find yourself unable to pay by this date, please contact the school to discuss options for a payment plan so this can be in place by this date.

St Matthew's recognises its responsibility to safeguard pupils and provide support to families where appropriate. The school works with a number of agencies, such as Stretford Foodbank, in order to provide such support. Please contact a member of school staff should you wish to discuss this further.

As we are a cashless school, please ensure that school payments are paid via Parent Pay. If you have any issues or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the office and someone will be more than happy to support you.

Current fees (as of February 2025):

School lunch: £2.70

Nursery top-up session: £10.00

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 children's education. I'm sure you can understand our reasons for implementing this policy; however, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Miss Lynton
Headteacher

Appendix 2- Phone call script

Hello, is that the parent or carer of (Pupil Name)?

This is XXX from St Matthew's CE Primary School. I am ringing in relation to the payment due for £XX on your child's Parent Pay account.

Please can you make arrangements to clear this debt within the next 5 working days.

Unfortunately, if this debt remains, XXX won't be able to receive school meals (or Nursery top-up if applicable).

Is this something you are able to pay today?

If necessary: If you feel you are in a period of financial difficulties, we do have a Child and Family Development Officer you could talk to if you would like to know what support we can signpost you to?

Thank you for your time.

Appendix 3- First Letter

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)

According to our records there is an outstanding debt 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 this debt, please make arrangements for the outstanding debt to be paid immediately. Once you have cleared the current debt, I would ask that you keep your account in credit. The current cost of a school meal is £XX per day or £XX per week.

Please arrange for this to be paid as soon as possible via Parent Pay, our secure online payment system. You can use the login details previously provided. Please visit www.parentpay.com. If you cannot remember your login details, please do contact the office for support.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information.

Whilst there is an outstanding debt on the account, all paid services, such as school meals and chargeable Nursery top-up sessions, will cease until the debt is cleared. If your child usually receives school meals, please send in a packed lunch. If your child attends chargeable Nursery top-up sessions, please make alternative arrangements for them during this time.

If you have any queries regarding this debt, or wish to discuss the matter further, please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

Yours sincerely

Miss S Lynton
Headteacher

Appendix 4- Second Letter

Second Letter Parent or carer of XXXXX XXXXXXX

Dear xxx

School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)

I am very concerned that the current debt remains outstanding on your account.

Despite previous correspondence and messages, the debt for xx in Year xx is still outstanding.

The School's records show that as at xx/xx/xx your account is £x in debt.

School has to fund all school meal debts from its budget. Therefore, it is essential that all payments maintained so that the quality of the service provided to all pupils is maintained.

I'm sure you will appreciate that the school operates on a limited budget and therefore, to enable us to provide for the welfare of the children, 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, while the debt remains, chargeable services continue to be withdrawn. So that these can continue, please make arrangements to clear the debt by XX/XX/XX. We are happy to discuss arrangements for a payment plan if this would be helpful.

IF OVER £25: I very much regret that if you do not take steps to resolve the position without delay, then Governors will consider legal action to recover the outstanding debt together with all costs involved.

If you have any queries regarding this debt, 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

Miss S Lynton
Headteacher