



THE
WESTCLIFFE
FEDERATION

School Meal Provisions and Debt Management Policy

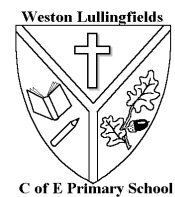
Approved by:

Governing Body

Date: March 2023

Next review due by:

March 2025



Contents:

Statement of intent

1. Legal framework
2. Charging for school meals
3. Free school meals (FSM)
4. Management of school meal debts
5. Exceptional circumstances and remissions
6. Monitoring and review

Appendices

- A. Reminder letter
- B. Final warning letter
- C. Outstanding debt payment plan letter

Statement of intent

[The Westcliffe Federation](#) is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all pupils, regardless of financial circumstances, and has established the following policy and procedures to ensure that no child is discriminated against.

The governing body is responsible for ensuring that school meal provisions are accessible to all pupils and that procedures are in place for the recovery of any outstanding debt.

This policy has been adopted to ensure that there is a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents whose children eat school meals. The responsibility falls on the school to pursue instances of non-payment.

The school budget will be directly affected by any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered, thereby directly affecting all pupils in school. We are confident that every parent will agree that this is unacceptable, and we encourage that all parents give this policy their full support.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- The Education Act 1996
- The Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014
- DfE (2018) 'Charging for school activities'
- DfE (2020) 'Governance handbook'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Complaints Procedures Policy
- Debt Recovery Policy
- Charging and Remissions Policy⁴.
- Whole-School Food Policy

2. Charging for school meals

School meals are available to pupils at a cost of or at no cost to those in receipt of FSM entitlement – see details of FSM entitlement [below](#).

Payment for school meals are made at the beginning of the week that the meals are required and can be made weekly, fortnightly, monthly or when the account nears zero. Payment can be made using our online payment system.

3. Free school meals (FSM)

There is a statutory right to FSM for families who meet certain criteria. It is important that all parents who qualify take up their entitlement so that their child can receive a school meal each day.

Parents who receive one or more of the following support payments are entitled to receive FSM (assuming the parent does not receive working tax credit):

- Universal Credit
- Income support
- Income-based jobseeker's allowance
- Income-related employment and support allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guaranteed element of pension credit
- Child tax credit (provided they are not also entitled to working tax credit and have an annual gross income of no more than the current threshold)
- Working tax credit run-on – paid for four weeks after they stop qualifying for working tax credit

As of 1 April 2018, all existing FSM claimants will receive FSM whilst Universal Credit is rolled out. This will apply even if their earnings rise above the new threshold during that time.

In addition, any pupil who is eligible for FSM after 1 April 2018 is protected against losing FSM during the Universal Credit rollout period.

Once Universal Credit is fully rolled out, any existing claimants that no longer meet the eligibility criteria at that point (because they are earning above the threshold or are no longer a recipient of Universal Credit) will continue to receive FSM until the end of their current phase of education. The Universal Credit rollout is currently expected to be completed in March 2022.

A pupil is only eligible to receive FSM when a claim for FSM has been made on their behalf and their eligibility has been verified by the school.

The responsibility for checking the eligibility of applicants for FSM rests with the school; however, the school may choose to work with the LA to carry out these checks via their eligibility checking system.

The school and LA, where appropriate, should record the date on which they receive the initial application for FSM from a parent. Eligibility checks are carried out promptly to ensure that the most accurate and up-to-date information is being utilised.

4. Management of school meal debts

Where there is an outstanding payment yet to be received and the acceptable credit period has been surpassed, an invoice will be created outlining the value and reason for the debt, as well as the debtor's identity.

Upon creating the invoice and stipulating a date on which it must be paid by, the school acknowledges that the debt has been set up via letter or email.

Steps of management of debt

Initial verbal reminder – e.g. informal correspondence via telephone notifying the person of debt (date and time should be officially recorded).

First formal written reminder – an official, dated letter addressed to the debtor is written up **two weeks** after the first informal reminder and acknowledges that it took place.

Second formal written reminder – this is sent **two weeks** after the second reminder, citing the details of both previous reminders and stating that concerted efforts have been made to make the person aware that an outstanding debt is overdue.

If these reminders are not responded to, another letter is sent to the debtor advising them that the case has been referred to the school's legal advisors and governing body. These parties agree on a timeframe for a repayment or, if necessary, a payment plan for separate instalments.

The school expects that the debt should be repaid as soon as possible, particularly after repeated reminders; however, this can be negotiated at the discretion of the governing body.

If there is a case where the debtor is deemed to be refusing to pay without sufficient reason, the school may consider involving the LA's legal services to resolve the issue and recuperate owed funds.

5. Exceptional circumstances and remissions

The school ensures that parents of pupils are aware of the help the school can extend to those in financial difficulty. Parents who may be eligible for remissions are those in receipt of any of the benefits outlined in section 3 of this policy.

In a case where there is, or it is suspected that there is, an overdue debt from a family who may qualify for remissions, details of the different types of bursaries available should be sent to the debtor in question.

The governing body is not guaranteed, but may decide, to waive or reduce the outstanding debt in these circumstances.

6. Monitoring and review

This policy is reviewed annually by the governing body and headteacher. The next scheduled review date for this policy is March 2025.

Appendix A: Reminder letter

Address line one

Address line two

City/town

Postcode

Date

Re: Reminder letter of payment for school meals

Dear name of parent,

According to our records, it appears that there is an outstanding payment for school meals for your child as from today. The amount due for payment is amount. We would be grateful if you would kindly clear this outstanding balance straight away. The last payment shown on our system was made on date.

If the debt is not paid, the issue will be escalated to the governing body. Please pay via Parent App, or, if you wish to pay by cheque, please make it payable to Shropshire Council.

If you have any queries or difficulties with the payment of this amount, please let us know immediately and we will endeavour to help. Feel free to contact the school office via telephone number.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Name

Headteacher

Appendix B: Final warning letter

Address line one

Address line two

City/town

Postcode

Date

Re: Final warning letter for payment of school meals debt

Dear name of parent,

We have written to you previously regarding your child's outstanding school meal fees and, according to our records, we still have not received any payment. The last payment shown on our system was made on date.

The amount due for payment is amount and, as per our School Meals Provisions and Debt Management Policy, unless we receive payment by date, your child will need to bring a packed lunch until the debt has been paid, via Parent App or cheque.

If the debt is not paid within this time, the issue will be escalated to the governing body.

If you have any queries or difficulties with the payment of this amount, please let us know and we will endeavour to help.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Name

Headteacher

Appendix C: Outstanding debt payment plan letter

Address line one

Address line two

City/town

Postcode

Date

RE: Outstanding debt payment plan

Dear name of parent,

I am writing to you following our discussion with the governing body regarding your outstanding debts to the school. [Outline here the details of the meeting with the parent and governing body to discuss the payment schedule. Note the date and time of the meeting, outline the conclusions that came from the meeting, and reflect the agreed payment schedule using the table – an example of phrasing can be seen below.]

As discussed on date and time, you currently owe the school £0.00 – a full breakdown of which can be found in the invoice issued to you on date, which is attached.

We appreciate that money pressures can be stressful and, as agreed in our previous communication with the governing body, we have outlined the agreed payment plan below.

Payment plan

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Outstanding debt | |
| Schedule of payments | |
| Total number of payments agreed | |
| Instalment amount | |
| First payment date | |
| Second payment date | |
| Third payment date | |
| Fourth payment date | |
| Final payment date | |

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Payment method | |
|-----------------------|--|

Please note, any missed or late payments within this payment schedule will result in a final notice of payment. Once you have received the final notice, you will have **seven** days to pay the outstanding fee. If, after this time, no payment has been received, we will initiate formal legal proceedings.

If your financial situation changes and you are able to pay the remaining debts sooner than the schedule, you can contact the headteacher to discuss whether payments will be accepted.

We understand that financial difficulties can place great strain on people. If you are currently experiencing financial difficulties and would like to speak to somebody for advice, you may find the following organisations helpful:

- Money Advice Service, available on 0800 138 7777 or at: <https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en>
- Citizens Advice, available on 0800 144 8848 or at: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/contact-us/contact-us/>
- National Debtline, available on 0808 808 4000 or at: <https://www.nationaldebtline.org/contact-us/>

If you have any additional questions regarding your debt or payment plan with the school, you can contact **name** on **email** and we can discuss your options to avoid any issues with repayment.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation with the payment plan.

Best wishes,

Name

Headteacher