



St John's Gosport C of E Primary School

School Debt Policy

Ratification Date:	June 2022	Headteacher: Chair of Governors:	Carolyn Wilkinson Jean Watson
Reviewed:	May 2024	Headteacher:	Carolyn Wilkinson

School Vision:

St John's Gosport C of E Primary School endeavours to provide a happy, safe, caring community rooted in Christian values; where everyone is valued and grows to their full potential.

John 10:10 – I came so that they may have life – life in all its fullness

Mission Statement:

At St John's Gosport C of E Primary School we aim to achieve our vision by providing a broad balanced curriculum and learning experiences that develop our children in body, mind and spirit; setting high standards for all, confident that we can achieve success. Thus ensuring that when our children leave us they are independent learners, who are well equipped to be responsible citizens of the future and reach their potential.

Safeguarding at St John's C of E Primary School is carried out in line with the statutory guidance in 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' published by the Department for Education.

This policy is based on guidance from Hampshire County Council

1.0 Introduction

As from 8th June 2022 St John's C of E Primary School has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy relating to the school meals service and Breakfast Club provision

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.

Currently all children in Early Years and KS1 are entitled to a free school meal as part of the DfE Universal Infant Free School Meals. This does not extend to children in KS2 (Year 3,4,5 and 6) therefore if a parent wishes for their child to have a school meal then this should be paid for.

We do not wish any parent to struggle to pay for a school meal. If parents believe that their children may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals, please visit the eligibility checking service via:

www.hants.gov.uk/hc3s/freeschoolmeals.htm

This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. Should you need assistance with your application please contact the school office and we will help you as best we can.

2.0 Paying for School Meals

Any school meal must be paid for in advance using any of the following methods:

- Online using the school's online payment system (preferred option)
- By cash, sending in money in a clearly marked envelope to your child's class teacher
- By cash at the school office

Children will not be provided with a school lunch unless it is paid for, except those that are entitled to Free School Meals or Universal Infant Free School Meals.

To help parents, we recommend that they pay for a period of school meals in advance if they are able to, using this guide: (Prices as of June 2023)

One full week of school meals = £15

One full month (4 weeks) of school meals = £60

One half term (8 weeks) of school meals =£120

This school will take all reasonable measures to collect debts vigorously as part of its management of public funds. This policy will observe the relevant financial regulations and guidance given by Hampshire County Council and other legal requirements.

3.0 Breakfast Club

Parents must book any place at the school Breakfast Club half-termly in advance as far as reasonably possible, using the booking forms available at the School Office. All additional places booked, must also be paid for in advance.

Each Breakfast Club session is priced at £ 5.50

We recommend that parents pay the minimum of a week's sessions in advance; however we recognise that sometimes a last-minute request is needed for the safeguarding and security of your child.

4.0 Monitoring and Reporting of Debt

The Headteacher will ensure that the level of debt is regularly monitored. Suitable records will be maintained and reported to the Governor finance group.

5.0 Debt Recovery Procedures

Where payment from the parent or guardian has not been received in advance or at the point of sale, the following process should be applied:

5.1 Debt Recovery Procedures – School Meals

Step 1:

Initial **Overdue Payment Reminder**: This initial reminder will usually be a reminder text to the Primary Contact of the child only and will say:

Your child's school meal account is now in arrears of £[amount]. Please provide a packed lunch until further notice. Please contact the school office urgently to arrange payment. If you are struggling with payment please ring and talk to us confidentially. St John's C of E Primary School.

Step 2:

Second **Overdue Payment text**: If the debt is not settled the following day then we will be unable to provide your child with school meal and you **MUST** provide a packed lunch or take the child home for dinner. If a child with an outstanding meal debt orders a school meal then the office will telephone the parents to make alternative arrangements for lunchtime. Please tell us if you are unable to pay immediately and we will agree a way in which you can pay off the debt.

This will be followed by a more formal text:

As discussed, £[amount] is owed for school meals taken by [child's name]. Please provide a packed lunch for [child's name] until further notice. Please make a full payment by [Date/usually the following day]. St John's C of E Primary School

If the parents cannot be contacted the formal text should read:

£[amount] is owed for school meals taken by [child's name]. We are yet to hear from you following our texts this week. Please provide a packed lunch for [child's name] until further notice. Please contact the school office urgently to speak to us and to make a full payment by [Date] at the latest. St John's C of E Primary School

Step 3:

If there is no response to the second overdue payment text or telephone call, the debtor will be invited, in writing, to meet the Headteacher to discuss how the debt will be settled using the

template below which has been created for all Hampshire schools by the Hampshire Legal Services Team.

Dear [NAME OF PARENT]

RE: [NAME OF CHILD]

I am disappointed to note that despite several reminders you currently owe the school £[INSERT SUM] in relation to unpaid school meals.

If the outstanding sum is not paid at the start of school next Monday I am afraid that [NAME OF CHILD] will not be permitted to have a school lunch until further notice and should be provided, by you, with a packed lunch. Failure by you to provide a packed lunch may result in a referral to Children Services.

I am, of course, willing to discuss the possibility of you repaying this debt in instalments. Please make an appointment with the school office to see me within the next week. If your family circumstances have changed and you think that you may be entitled to free school meals for [NAME OF CHILD], we will be able to discuss this at the meeting.

If you do not accept my invitation to attend a meeting or fail to repay any agreed terms, I shall be taking legal advice as to the possibility of recovering any unpaid sums from you via the County Court.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

*Yours sincerely
Headteacher*

At this meeting every effort will be made to work with the parent/guardian to pay off the existing debt and a sensitive approach to debt recovery will be carried out.

Failure to attend the meeting or stick to the agreed terms of repayment decided in the meeting will result in a referral to the County Treasurer's debt collection department via the County Court. This decision will be reported to the resources committee.

5.2 Debt Recovery Procedures – Breakfast Club

Step 1:

Initial **Overdue Payment Reminder**: This initial reminder will usually be a reminder text to the Primary Contact of the child only and will say:

Your child's Breakfast Club account is now in arrears of £[amount]. Please contact the school office urgently to discuss this situation and to arrange payment. Any future bookings may be cancelled if this amount is not paid. St John's C of E Primary School

Step 2:

Second **Overdue Payment text**: If the debt is not settled the following day or the school has not received any contact from either parent, a more formal text will be sent:

As discussed, £[amount] is owed for sessions at Breakfast Club taken by [child's name]. Please make a full payment by [Date/usually the following day]. We are happy to discuss a payment plan with you however, we have the right to cancel all future sessions for [child's name] unless we hear from you tomorrow. St John's C of E Primary School

Step 3:

If there is no response to the second overdue payment text or telephone call, the debtor will be invited, in writing, to meet the Headteacher to discuss how the debt will be settled. A template letter is stated below, which has been created for all Hampshire schools by the Hampshire Legal Services Team.

Dear [NAME OF PARENT]

RE: [NAME OF CHILD]

I am disappointed to note that despite several reminders you currently owe the school £[INSERT SUM] in relation to unpaid extended services for your child. I am very concerned at this current level of debt outstanding on your Breakfast Club account.

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 am 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 [usually the first date of the next month], we will no longer be able to offer the services of the Breakfast Club to your child.

I am, of course, willing to discuss the possibility of you repaying this debt in instalments. Please make an appointment with the school office to see me within the next week where we will be able to discuss this at the meeting.

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.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears then please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

*Yours sincerely
Headteacher*

6.0 Related information

We are certain that by implementing this debt policy, we can help parents/carers manage school payments better and, at the same time, ensure that the school budget is used directly for our pupil's education.

Whilst this policy relates to School Meals and Wrap Around Care, there may be other occasions where parents/carers are invoiced for goods/services not exclusive to school meals or extended services. Therefore, this policy will be used in all cases of debt to the school.