

# *Stradbroke Primary Debt Recovery Policy*



<u>Written By</u>	<u>Written Date</u>	<u>Review Date</u>	<u>Approved by</u>
John Sitch	Sep 2022	Sep 2023	Governing Body

## Stradbroke Primary School Policy for school meal debt recovery

### Policy Statement

The Stradbroke Primary School meal debt recovery policy has been adopted to ensure there is a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school meals. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them. As the Local Authority is no longer accountable for the administration of dinner money debt the responsibility now falls on the school to pursue instances of non-payment.

If you are a parent of a child in the Foundation Stage or KS1 you are now entitled to receive Universal Infant Free School Meals. However, the Free School Meals system is there for parents of children of **all** ages to claim if they are in receipt of certain benefits. Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that all parents/carers who qualify take up their child's entitlement so that they can receive a school meal each day. Information on the entitlement to free school meals and an application form can be found on the Sheffield City Council Website: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/education/information-for-parentscarers/at-school/school-meals/free-school-meals>.

If a child's entitlement to free school meals expires or the parents/carers personal circumstances change the parent/carer must provide a packed lunch or make a payment in advance via our online payment system, Parent Pay, for a school dinner. If you think you may be entitled to means tested free school meals, please contact the school office who will assist you with your application if required. All you need is your national insurance number.

### Payment for School Meals

The school wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals, which can then be difficult to clear. It is very time consuming for the office staff to continually chase parents for payment by letter and phone call. It is also very embarrassing for all concerned and can occasionally have a negative effect on our relationships with families.

Payment for school meals must be made in advance or on the day of consumption via our online payment portal, Parent Pay. There is a £10 minimum payment. Parents should contact the school if there is a genuine reason why they are unable to pay. **School no longer accepts cash payments.**

### Management of School Meal Debts

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school will grant a debt allowance of a **maximum** of £20 per family (which is equivalent to 10 meals). If this level is reached, the debt must be completely cleared and the account in credit before a school meal can be ordered again. Reminders will be sent out frequently via Parent Pay. If the debt is not cleared via Parent Pay, parents must provide a packed lunch. In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the school office will contact the parent by phone or text and ask them to clear the outstanding balance or provide a packed lunch before lunchtime. We recognise that there may be an occasion when you are simply unable to make alternative arrangements and in this rare circumstance, school

staff will make your child a sandwich to ensure that they are fed. **This will not reflect the choice on offer within the kitchen.**

Where a child continues to take unpaid meals, the school will try to establish if the child is entitled to free school meals - under these circumstances the parent/carer should be invited to apply. If a parent or carer is not entitled to claim free school meals and is experiencing hardship, please speak to the school office about this and we will do our best to help.

### **Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts**

The Headteacher will provide Governors with details of any outstanding dinner money debt and the current position with regard to such debt. The aim of the school's meal debt recovery policy is to minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up. The school may refer any unpaid debts to Sheffield City Council debt collection service and reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal debts and inform the Local Authority that a child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunchtime.

By implementing this debt policy we are aiming to help parents manage school dinner money better and to ensure that money given to the school for educational purposes is spent in the correct way.