

Costock C of E Primary School



DEBT POLICY

Agreed by Governors: May 2018
Review date: Summer 2020

Introduction

This policy relates to payments for School Dinner, Breakfast Club and any other non-voluntary payments the school collects. This policy has been written to help our school adopt a consistent approach to such debts incurred by parents and it provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

Within this policy, the use of the term “parent” shall relate equally to parents, guardians and/or carer.

Costock C of E Primary school’s debt policy will observe the relevant financial regulations and guidance set out in the school’s Financial Regulations and any other legal requirements.

School Meals

The responsibility of ensuring school meal payments are made by parents lies with the School. Therefore, a policy is required to ensure school meal debts are kept to a minimum. In writing this policy, the Governors of Costock C of E Primary School wish to implement one that ensures meals are paid for, whilst aiding parents during financial difficulties and ensuring children still receive a meal at lunchtime.

School meals must be paid for in advance of meals being taken. School meals are charged at £2.29 per day (14 May 2018). Parents will be informed of any price increase to school meals, as soon as possible. All meals must be paid in advance and meals may be paid for on a daily, weekly, monthly, half termly or termly basis.

Should the account fall into arrears by 5 meals, then a reminder text will be sent requesting payment is made within 5 days. If the payment is still outstanding, a follow up phone call will be made and payment will once again be requested within 5 working days. Should the debt still be outstanding at this point, a meeting will be arranged between the Head Teacher and parent to discuss the issue. Should the parent fall into arrears on a regular basis the Head Teacher has the right to advise the parent/carer that their child may no longer be entitled to a school lunch and they may be asked to send their child to school with a packed lunch or collect them to give them a lunch at home until the debt is cleared.

When a child is leaving it is imperative for the school office to check the balance of the child’s account and refund any credit balance and obtain any debt outstanding.

The child may be eligible to receive free school meals, if the parent is in receipt of the following (correct as of May 2018):

- Income Support

- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigrations & Asylum Act 1999,
- The Guarantee element of the State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (providing no entitlement to Working Tax Credit) and Working Tax Credit run-on

Please contact the school office, who can provide you with information of how to apply for free school meals. The school will encourage parents to make an application for free school meals, whether the child takes school meals or not, as the school will receive additional funding known as Pupil Premium.

Since schools will be invoiced for meals taken it is essential that sufficient funds are credited for these meals, as if there are insufficient funds then the school will have to cover the shortfall from their budget.

Breakfast Club

This policy has been written to help our school adopt a consistent approach to debt incurred by parents whose children attend the school Breakfast Club. As per the agreement signed by the parent/carer, payment is required for all days booked even if the child does not attend; the exception being when school is closed. Should the child no longer require a place, the parent/carer is to advise the school office by the last day of the half term if the place is not required for the next half term, otherwise the parent/carer is still liable for charges as per the terms and conditions.

Invoices will be issued on a half-termly basis and will clearly state the date payment is due. If payment is not made by the due date then a reminder text will be sent requesting payment is made within 5 days. If the payment is still outstanding, a follow up phone call will be made and payment will once again be requested within 5 working days. Should the debt still be outstanding at this point, a meeting will be arranged between the Head Teacher and parent to discuss the issue. Should the parent fall into arrears on a regular basis the Head Teacher has the right to withdraw the child's place until the debt is cleared.

When a child is leaving it is imperative for the school office to check the balance of the child's account and refund any credit balance and obtain any debt outstanding.

Reporting of outstanding debt levels

The Head Teacher/Office Manager will ensure that the level of outstanding debt is regularly monitored. Suitable records will be maintained to detail individual debts and the total value of debt to the school.

Debt Recovery Procedures

Where payment from the parent has not been received within the above acceptable credit period, a meeting will be arranged with the Head Teacher and parent/carer to come to an agreement about how the debt will be cleared and any repayment terms.

A sensitive approach to debt recovery will be carried out and in exceptional circumstances, which may include the following factors, the school may reduce or agree to write off a debt.

- Hardship – where paying the debt would cause severe financial hardship.
- Ill health – where recovery action might cause further ill health.
- Time – where the debt is so large compared to the person's income that it would take an unreasonable length of time to pay it all off.

The Governing Body acknowledges that, on occasion, families have financial difficulties and in these proven circumstances, the school will work hard with the family to agree a solution which is not to the detriment of the child.