



SCHOOL DEBT POLICY

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Reviewed by:	Governing Body	Responsibility:	Governing Body
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Review Cycle:	2 Years	Ratified by GB:	27 th March 2023

1. Statement of Intent

This policy has been written to help our school to adopt a consistent approach to debt with a view to complete elimination. It provides clarity and consistency in managing debt and will also help parents and carers clearly understand what is expected of them.

Purbrook Junior School aims to work with parents and would ask that if a family is having financial difficulties, please do make an appointment to discuss this with either Mrs Ginn, our Home School Link Worker or Mr Williams, our Headteacher. The school may be able to direct you to additional services and organisations who may be able to help you. Early intervention can help avoid debts at school building up. Please be assured that any information will be treated in confidence.

The services provided by Purbrook Junior School are no different to those provided by any other business in that meals and other services must be paid for in advance and on demand. Most parents and carers understand that they cannot take their child to McDonalds and expect the provision of food or services without paying, or expect a football coach or music teacher to teach their child(ren) free of charge.

However a minority of parents or carers do not pay on time for services provided by the school, putting the school in the position of subsidising these few families with funding that is intended by law for all children, as well as causing considerable extra work for office staff and embarrassment for all concerned by chasing outstanding money owed to the school.

The Governors at Purbrook Junior School take the stance that the best system of approach is a 'NO DEBT' policy. We understand that it may seem a very hard stand as there has been a culture of debt tolerance, and that this will be tough to implement. However, it should become easy to maintain once parents and carers realise our school only offers free school meals to children whose parents or carers qualify for Free School Meal (FSM) entitlement.

Parents and carers should be aware that when there is an outstanding debt at school, access to other services, e.g. music tuition, breakfast club and after school activities, will not be permitted until the debt is cleared.

2. School Lunches

Children will not be provided with a school lunch unless it is paid for in advance (except for those children entitled to Free School Meals).

The charge for a school lunch is £2.80 per day (as at January 2023), per child; if your child has a school lunch every day, the amount equates to £14.00 per week. It is the parent or carer's responsibility to ensure sufficient credit is available in your child(ren)'s lunch account. A lunch register balance is available on your ParentMail account which you can check at any time. Payments can be made via ParentMail or at the school office. If you send payments into school with your child, please ensure that they are in a named, sealed envelope.

School lunches are ordered during morning registration period daily. If your child orders a school meal their ParentMail account will be charged accordingly. You will not be charged if your child is sent home poorly prior to the lunch being taken. It is the parent or carer's responsibility to ensure that their child is or is not ordering a school meal. If a child orders a school meal, the school will assume that they have been given permission to do so.

If a parent or carer genuinely forgets to pay, the school may grant a debt allowance of one meal. However this debt must be paid by the end of the day of receipt or at the latest the next day and future meals must be paid for in advance before any more meals are provided.

Parents and carers of children who arrive without their lunch money or a packed lunch will be contacted either by phone or text and asked to come into school with the money if a school lunch is required, a packed lunch, or to make arrangements for their child to be collected for a home lunch. The school office must be informed by 10.30 am so that the child can be told what has been arranged, and in time for the office staff to order a school meal from the kitchen if required (after this time the school meals are being prepared and cooked).

School Lunch Debt Policy Implementation

Level 1: Child(ren) arrive at school with no packed lunch, no credit on their lunch account or no arrangements made for them to go home at lunchtime.

Action:

- Office staff phone or text parent or carer requesting that they come back to school with the money for lunch or remotely credit their ParentMail account, provide a packed lunch or make arrangements for the child(ren) to go home for lunch.
- If parent or carer is unable to return to school and requests school provides a school lunch, agrees to pay before the close of the day or at the latest the following morning.

Level 2: After several attempts to engage with Parents at level 1 and the Child(ren) continues to arrive at school with no packed lunch, no credit on their lunch account or no arrangements made for them to go home at lunchtime. The level of debt is increasing.

Action:

- Office staff phone or text parent or carer requesting that they come back to school with the money for lunch or remotely credit their ParentMail account, provide a packed lunch or make arrangements for the child(ren) to go home for lunch.
- Office staff generate debt letter which will also indicate that no more meals will be provided by the school. Parents or carers invited in to meet with the School Business Manager to set up a payment plan if hardship is being experienced.
- Office staff complete a school Child Protection notification (via CPOMS) to flag up issue of concern.
- School may contact Children's Services for advice.

Level 3: Child(ren) still continues to arrive at school with no packed lunch, no credit on their lunch account or no arrangements made for them to go home at lunchtime.

Action:

- Office staff generate final warning debt letter stating that meeting with Headteacher is required to avoid commencement of legal proceedings.
- Office staff complete a school Child Protection notification (via CPOMS) to flag up further issue of concern.
- Headteacher contacts Children's Services for advice.
- The school will no longer provide a school meal, until such time as the debt is cleared in full.

2. Music tuition

The school has to pay Hampshire Music Service in advance for the provision of music teachers so it is essential that sufficient funds are available. If there are insufficient funds from those parents and carers who use these services, the school has to cover the shortfall from the schools' main budget allocated for all children. That would be unfair, illegal and unsustainable. Children will not be able to receive music tuition unless parents have paid in advance of attendance.

Payments for music tuition can be made via ParentMail or at the school office and balances are available on your

ParentMail account.

Music Tuition Debt Policy Implementation

Level 1: The charge for music tuition is not paid by the agreed dates

Action:

- Office staff send reminders for payment (maximum of three)

Level 2a: A child continues to attend music lessons and the debt remains outstanding

Action:

- The Headteacher issues a final outstanding debt letter and the child is withdrawn from further music lessons until such time as the debt has been cleared.
- The Headteacher may begin legal proceedings to recover the debt.

Level 2b: The debt for music tuition remains outstanding by child no longer attending music lessons

Action:

- The Headteacher issues a final outstanding debt letter.
- The Headteacher may begin legal proceedings to recover the debt.

3. Other services, e.g. breakfast club and after school activities

The school purchases supplies and resources in advance and has to pay staff to run our breakfast club and after school activities, so it is essential that sufficient funds are available. If there are insufficient funds from those parents and carers who use these services, the school has to cover the shortfall from the schools' main budget allocated for all children. That would be unfair, illegal and unsustainable. Children will not be able to attend breakfast club or after school activities unless parents have paid in advance of attendance.

Payments for breakfast club and after school clubs can be made via ParentMail or at the school office and balances (for breakfast club and after school care club) are available on your ParentMail account.

If a parent or carer genuinely forgets to pay, the school may grant a debt allowance of one attendance.

Other services, breakfast club and after school activities Debt Policy Implementation

Level 1: A child's account goes into arrears

Action:

- Extended Services staff generate reminders to parents and carers that account is in arrears and attendance at clubs may be restricted (maximum of 3 reminders)

Level 2: A child continues to be sent to attend breakfast or after school clubs whilst outstanding debts remain on their account and/or amount of debt increases

Action:

- Parents or carers will be informed that their child(ren) can no longer attend clubs whilst the debt is outstanding.
- The Headteacher may begin legal proceedings to recover the debt.

4. Key Information

- A copy of this debt policy is available to view on the school website www.purbrook-jun.hants.sch.uk and available as a hard copy from the school office.
- All services provided by the school including lunches or before and after school clubs must be paid for in advance.
- Parents and carers should not send their child(ren) to school without funding and expect the school to provide them with school lunches or attend before and after school care.
- Parents and carers who don't want their child to have a school lunch should provide a healthy packed lunch

- or make arrangements for them to go home at lunch time.
- All parents and carers will be provided with a copy of this policy when their child(ren) are admitted to this school.
 - Parents and carers who are experiencing difficulty paying for a chargeable service offered by the school should inform the school office immediately. In most circumstances a payment plan can be agreed to help parents clear their debt to the school as soon as possible.
 - Debts left unpaid may be passed to a professional debt collection agency to legally recover on behalf of the school.
 - County Court proceedings may also be considered in exceptional cases.
 - Parents and carers will be reminded of this policy annually at the beginning of the academic year and periodically throughout via ParentMail and the school website.

5. Monitoring and Review

The Governing Body will review and monitor outstanding debts from information contained in a termly debt report provided by the School Business Manager, to make a decision about pursuing outstanding debts through legal proceedings.

This policy is monitored and reviewed by the Governing Body every two years or earlier if deemed necessary.