

# **DEBT RECOVERY POLICY**

**March 2024**

**Hollyfield Primary School**  
**...a place where everyone matters**



**Version:**

March 2024

**Ratified by the Governing Body:**

20 March 2024

**Signed by the Governing Body:**

**To be reviewed (annually):**

March 2025

## **Introduction**

This policy has been created to ensure the appropriate procedures are in place to deal with any school debts. It encompasses all debts owed to the School, Hollyfield Primary School including but not limited to, payment for goods, services, school trips and school meal payments. The Governing Body has a duty to ensure the School receives all funds due so that neither the School nor its stakeholders are disadvantaged.

This policy has been written in recognition of the difficulties we face in balancing the social welfare of pupils in our care with the responsibility of managing the School Budget. The Debt Recovery Policy aims to reduce the risks of parents/carers incurring large debts that they may struggle to pay at a future date and to help identify any financial hardships facing our families so that we can make appropriate interventions to support them. This policy will also help us to minimise the amount of staff time taken to chase outstanding payments.

The consistent and fair approach identified in this policy will help parents and carers to understand the School's procedure and what is expected of them. Any debt incurred by the school, whether small or large, has to be reimbursed from the school budget. This limits spending in other areas to the detriment of the school's educational provision in the long term.

The School's preferred method of payments is via ParentPay. The School does not accept cash payments for items unless agreed in advance.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the School's Charging and Remissions Policy.

## **Key Information**

All services provided, including school meals, music tuition and residential trips MUST be paid for in advance. The School will request a voluntary donation towards educational enrichment (curricular) trips.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Governing Body of Hollyfield Primary School's Finance and Resources Committee.

## **Chargeable Services**

### **School Meals**

Hollyfield Primary School has a duty to provide Free School Meals to pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 as part of Universal Infant Free School Meals government grant, but there is no obligation beyond this.

School meals for children in Years 3-6 MUST be paid for in advance unless the child is entitled to Free School Meals (see below). If arrears exist, the School can refuse to continue to provide school meals.

### **Free School Meals Entitlement**

You do not have to pay for school lunches if you are in receipt of the following, as indicated in the DfE Free School Meals guidance, April 2023:

- Universal Credit
- Income Support
- Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guarantee element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for four weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

You can check your eligibility for Free School Meals for your child/children online at <https://pps.lgfl.org.uk/>

Please note that Free School Meals eligibility is only valid once parents/carers have received confirmation of your child's entitlement. Parents/carers will be required to pay for meals until confirmation has been received.

### **Additional and Optional Extra Services**

Some activities, which can be purchased via the school, are considered additional and an optional extra service. All of these must be paid for in advance. Where payment is not made, the school reserves the right to remove access to any or all of the activities (debt is considered transferable).

Additional and optional extra services may include, but are not limited to:

- Instrumental music lessons
- Afterschool clubs
- Residential trips

### **Year 6/Mid-year Leavers**

Where debts occur at the end of the Summer Term and remain unpaid when the child leaves the School, the School will transfer the debt to younger siblings if they are still on roll at the School.

Debts, which remain if a child leaves the School, will be pursued via email/telephone/letter and then passed to Birmingham City Council Legal team to pursue.

### **Offsetting of Income**

If a parent/carer owes money to the school, but is in credit with another activity, for example the parent has paid for a trip which is subsequently cancelled, the school has the right to offset some or all of the credit towards settlement of the debt before issuing any refunds. Similarly, if a parent is in debt for an activity, i.e. music tuition or a residential trip, but then pays for an alternative item, such as another school trip, the School reserves the right to offset the income to the previous debt.

### **Payments**

Hollyfield Primary is a cashless school. All payments for chargeable services should be made in advance using the ParentPay online system. If you have any difficulty accessing the ParentPay system please contact the School Office immediately.

## **Debt Recovery**

The Headteacher will ensure that the level of outstanding debt is regularly monitored. Where payment for services is not received in advance and arrears accumulate, the following procedures will apply:

**1. Informal reminder** – Parents will be informally reminded at the end of the week by email/letter home that monies are owed. This will then be followed up the following week by telephone, if the debt is still outstanding.

**2. Formal warning** – For school lunches, if the debt still remains after 1 further week a formal reminder letter will be sent by the School requesting immediate payment or, if this is not possible, requesting you to arrange a meeting with the Headteacher or member of the Senior Leadership Team to discuss the reason for non-payment.

For other additional and optional extra services, a formal reminder letter will be sent after the due date of the payment. If after 5 school days, the debt is still outstanding without payment or a payment plan arrangement, the School will withdraw your child's place (see example letter below for 'additional or optional extra services').

We appreciate that from time to time, financial difficulties do arise. If this is the case please let the school know as soon as possible so that we can see if there are any ways in which we might be able to help, or refer you to an organisation that can.

**3. Final formal reminder for school meals** – If the debt is still outstanding without payment or a payment plan arrangement, one day after the meeting, a letter will be sent to the parent/carer advising them that the School will no longer provide the service.

The child/children will no longer be given a school meal and parents/carers will be required to provide a packed lunch for their child/children until the debt is cleared and their account is balanced. If the pupil repeatedly attends school with no packed lunch and the debt remains unpaid, the family may be referred to children's services under the category of neglect.

Parents will also be advised that they will be required to pay in advance fully for all future services or this will no longer be available to them. This decision and its basis will be recorded and reported to the Governing Body's Finance and Resources Committee.

## **Legal action**

Please note that the Headteacher and Governing Body reserves the right to take legal action to recover debts.

## Formal warning letter – school meals

Date

Dear

### **Re: Dinner Money Arrears**

Name of Child/Children: \_\_\_\_\_ Class(es): \_\_\_\_\_

Our records show that despite an email/letter on \_\_\_\_\_ and a follow up telephone call on \_\_\_\_\_ you have still not paid dinner money for your child/children.

As at \_\_\_\_\_ our records show a total debt of £\_\_\_\_\_

Please arrange for this money to be paid into your [ParentPay](#) account immediately. If you are unable to pay immediately, please contact the school office to arrange a meeting with myself or member of the Senior Leadership Team to discuss the reason for non-payment.

The cost of a school meal is £2.60 per day/ £13.00 per week and must be paid in advance.

If the debt remains unpaid, we will not be able to allow \_\_\_\_\_ to have any more school meals and you will need to provide them with a packed lunch until this balance is cleared.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Andy Holmes  
Headteacher

Enc. Debt Recovery Policy

## Final formal warning letter – school meals

Date

Dear

### **Re: Dinner Money Arrears – Final Notice**

Name of Child/Children: \_\_\_\_\_ Class(es): \_\_\_\_\_

Our records show that despite a previous reminder letter on \_\_\_\_\_ and our meeting on \_\_\_\_\_, you have still not paid dinner money for your child.

As at \_\_\_\_\_ our records show a total debt of £\_\_\_\_\_

Please arrange for this money to be paid into your [ParentPay](#) account immediately.

The cost of a school meal is £2.60 per day/ £13.00 per week and must be paid in advance.

Since non-payment for school meals affects the quality of service we offer to the children, we need to ensure that all payments are up to date. If the debt is not cleared within 5 school days, it will not be possible to provide your child/children with a school lunch with effect from \_\_\_\_\_, and you will need to provide them with a packed lunch.

Until the account is balanced, all future services provided by the school will need to be paid for in advance fully.

The school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the debt and to inform social services of our concerns that you are not providing a meal for your child at lunchtime.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Andy Holmes  
Headteacher

## Example formal warning letter for additional or optional extra services

Date

Dear

**Re: \_\_\_\_\_ Arrears**

Name of Child/Children: \_\_\_\_\_ Class(es): \_\_\_\_\_

Our records show that money for your child/children's \_\_\_\_\_ is overdue.

As at \_\_\_\_\_ our records show a total debt of £\_\_\_\_\_

Please arrange for this money to be paid into your [ParentPay](#) account immediately. If you are unable to pay immediately, please contact the school office to arrange a meeting with myself or member of the Senior Leadership Team to discuss the reason for non-payment.

The cost of \_\_\_\_\_ is £\_\_\_\_\_ and must be paid in advance.

If the debt is not cleared within 5 school days, the school will withdraw your child's place on \_\_\_\_\_ with effect from \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Andy Holmes  
Headteacher