



Lyon Park Primary School

**SCHOOL MEALS DEBT
POLICY**

March 2024

To be reviewed March 2025

Lyon Park School Meals Debt Policy

This policy has been written to help schools to adopt a consistent approach to debt. It provides clarity and consistency in managing debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

There have been many discussions around whether a child should be refused a meal in school if they have not paid. However, the school meals service is no different than any other business and the meals must be paid for by someone. Parents can easily relate to the situation that they cannot take their child to a restaurant and expect them to be given food without paying, yet a minority of parents expect free food in school.

The Free School Meals system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals, there should be no excuses. Applying for Free School Meals is straight forward and parents can apply over the telephone, assuming eligibility is authorised the child can take a free school meal the following school day. The system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach. It may seem a very hard stance in a school where there is a culture of debt tolerance. Although this will be tough to implement it will become easy to maintain once parents realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for FSM entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for. The ParentPay system highlights debt immediately so keeping track will be easy.

Debt policy implementation Key Information

1. All parents are provided with a copy of the debt policy when their child joins the school.
SEE APPENDIX 1
2. All school lunches must be paid for in advance
3. No child should be sent to school with no money in their account and expect to be given a meal
4. Parents who don't want their child to have a school lunch should provide a healthy packed lunch.

Level 1 Indicator: A child's account goes into debt

Check 1: is this a FSM child, are dates correct?

Check 2: is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 3: does this parent normally pay on time; is this just a one off?

Action 1: send a 'Gentle debt reminder' **Appendix 2**

This letter is already set up for the Finance Team to use in ParentPay. Run it instantly in Pupils>Mail merge

Level 2 Indicator: A child comes to school again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch.

Check 1: is this a FSM child, are dates correct?

Check 2: is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 3: has this parent made contact?

Action 2: Personal contact & strong debt letter **Appendix 3**

Letter sent to parent asking them to come in to discuss the debt and to pay online or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime.

Level 3 Indicator: The parent does not comply with any of these options above (appendix 3)

Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?

Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 3 has this parent made contact?

Action 3: send Final strong debt letter & outside agency referral **Appendix 4**

Parent will be sent a final debt letter advising them of external agency referral. This too is setup in ParentPay.

County Courts Money Claims Centre

Website - <https://www.gov.uk/make-court-claim-for-money>

Process either an online claim form or paper claim form – available via above link Send paper claim form to below address:

County Court Money Claims Centre
PO Box 527
Salford
M5 0BY

Claim amount	Paper form fee	Online claim fee
Up to £300	£35	£25
£300.01 to £500	£50	£35
£500.01 to £1,000	£70	£60
Claim amount	Paper form fee	Online claim fee
£1,000.01 to £1,500	£80	£70
£1,500.01 to £3,000	£115	£105
£3,000.01 to £5,000	£205	£185
£5,000.01 to £10,000	£455	£410
£10,000.01 to £100,000	5% of the claim	4.5% of the claim
£100,000.01 to £200,000	5% of the claim	You cannot make a claim online
More than £200,000	£10,000	You cannot make a claim online

To calculate 5% of the value of the claim, take the amount you're claiming and multiply it by 0.05. If necessary, round down the result to the nearest 1p.

The fee will be calculated for you if you make your claim online.

The school will refer all debts over £100.00 and all fees will be chargeable to the parent.

APPENDIX 1

School Meals Debt Policy for Parents updated 01/03/23

Lyon Park Primary School has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy relating to the school meal service. 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. No parent would take their child to a restaurant and expect them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school.

If parents believe that their children may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals please check your eligibility at www.fsm.lgfl.net. For more information please see our website. Please be aware that if entitled your child's entitlement will only be back dated to the date of the application.

This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. Help is available with your application either at the school office or by contacting Brent Admissions on Tel:02089373110.

Parents **must** pay in advance for the school lunches using any of the methods of payment outlined below:

- Pay via the **ParentPay** website using debit/credit card (PREFERRED METHOD) www.parentpay.com
- Request a barcode letter from finance to pay at any **PayPoint**

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of two week's worth of meals (£22.00). However, this debt must be paid by the next day and future meals must be paid in advanced before a hot meal is provided.

Any outstanding debt greater than £22.00 (two week's worth of lunches) where no packed has been provided children will be given a nutritional packed lunch. This will consist of a sandwich, water and fruit. Children will not be provided with a hot meal unless it is paid for in advance, except those that are entitled and receiving free school meals.

If you are experiencing financial difficulty please do not hesitate to contact our office and speak to one of the staff to discuss your circumstances.

If payment of the debt is not received, the Headteacher reserves the right to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt where the parent will be liable to all court fees.

Social services may also be informed that these parents are not carrying out their responsibility of care by not providing food for their children at lunchtime or childcare outside of school hours.

We hope that by implementing this debt policy we are able to help parents manage school dinner money better and at the same time ensure that all money that is for children's learning is available. If you have any concerns please do not hesitate in contacting me.

Yours sincerely,
Finance Team

APPENDIX 2 – Gentle debt reminder

Lyon Park Primary School

Parent or carer of:

Date:

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your childClass: As at .../.../.....your account is showing a debt of

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately. Once the debt is cleared please ensure the account is always in credit.

Parents **must** pay in advance for the school lunches using any of the methods of payment outlined below:

- Pay via the **ParentPay** website using debit/credit card (PREFERRED METHOD) www.parentpay.com Your username and password are: Username: xxxxxx Password: yyyyyyy
- Request a barcode letter from finance to pay at any **PayPoint**

No matter how you pay you can check the account balance anytime by logging into your ParentPay account at www.parentpay.com. You can see what meals have been taken and when. The cost of a school meal is £2.20 per day - £11.00 per week.

Any outstanding debt greater than £22.00 (two week's worth of lunches) where no packed has been provided children will be given a nutritional packed lunch. This will consist of a sandwich, water and fruit. Children will not be provided with a hot meal unless it is paid for in advance, except those that are entitled and receiving free school meals.

If you have not cleared the above debt you must provide a packed lunch for your child.

Please be reminded that only Reception to Year 2 children are entitled to free meals through the Government Scheme. If you think your child may be entitled to Free School Meals please visit www.fsm.lgfl.net to check your eligibility and apply through Brent School Admissions on Tel: 0208 937 3110. Please see our website for more information on how to apply. You will only be entitled from the date the application is submitted. Brent will not backdate for any meals taken before this.

If you are experiencing financial difficulty or need help with your ParentPay account please do not hesitate to contact our office and speak to one of the staff to discuss your circumstances. If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately.

Yours sincerely

Finance Team

APPENDIX 3 – Strong debt letter - £22.00 threshold nutritional packed lunch

RE: Outstanding Debt Balance – Nutritional packed Lunch Threshold

Dear Parent of _____ of _____,

The school finance team has reviewed your account and you currently have an outstanding debt of **£0.00**. Hence, you have hit the nutritional packed lunch threshold and you will need to provide with a packed lunch from ____DATE____.

Please see the break down below as of ____DATE____.

As you will be aware, school meals and other services, must be paid for in advance using our online payment system 'ParentPay' and we must therefore ask you to clear the outstanding balance and put your child's account in credit before any hot meal is provided.

Breakdown of outstanding balance:

Breakfast Club	£
After School Club	£
Dinner Money	£
Total outstanding	£

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately.

- Pay via the **ParentPay** website using debit/credit card (PREFERRED METHOD) www.parentpay.com
- Request a barcode letter from finance to pay at any **PayPoint**

Your child will not be able to accrue anymore debts with Lyon Park Primary School or attend any clubs until you have cleared this outstanding amount in full. You will need to make your own arrangements for your child's lunch and/or out of school childcare from ____**DATE**____

Outstanding debts affect the quality of service we are able to offer to the children. However, we understand the challenges that families face and will work with you to find a solution to clearing outstanding debts. If you are experiencing financial difficulty please do not hesitate to contact our office and speak to a member of the Senior Leadership Team to discuss your circumstances.

Please be reminded that only Reception to Year 2 children are entitled to free meals through the Universal Free School Meal Government Scheme. If you think your child may be entitled to Free School Meals please visit www.fsm.lgfl.net to check your eligibility and apply through Brent School Admissions. Please see our website for more information on how to apply. You will only be entitled from the date the application is submitted. Brent will not backdate for any meals taken before this.

Please do not ignore this notice.

Yours sincerely

School Business Manager

APPENDIX 4 – Final debt letter

RE: Outstanding Debt Balance – Final Letter Before Legal Action

Dear Parent/Carer of

Further to our most recent debt reminder letter dated XXXXX, you have failed to clear your debt or communicate with the school to discuss your outstanding debt which now amounts to £XX as of XXXXX.

Breakdown of outstanding balance:

Dinner Money	£XXX.XX
Total outstanding	£XXX.XX

In light of your child being provided a nutritional packed lunch by the school due to you not following the debt policy despite numerous reminders that all accounts must be kept in credit, the Head Teacher and School Business Manager would like to meet you with on XXXXXXX.

Please call the office to confirm you will be attending or to re arrange the meeting.

If you do not attend or communicate with the school and the outstanding amount is not paid back by XXXXX, the school will begin legal proceeding to recover the debt and inform social services of our concerns that you have not been providing a meal for your child at lunch time and/or ensuring your child is looked after outside of school hours.

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately by the secure online payment system ParentPay. In future all fees and charges must be paid weekly in advance.

Outstanding debts affect the quality of service we are able to offer to the children. However, we understand the challenges that families face and will work with you to find a solution to clearing outstanding debts. If you are experiencing financial difficulty please do not hesitate to contact our office and speak to a member of the Senior Leadership Team to discuss your circumstances.

If you think your child may be entitled to Free School Meals please visit www.fsm.lgfl.net to check your eligibility and apply through Brent School Admissions. Please see our website for more information on how to apply. You will only be entitled from the date the application is submitted. Brent will not backdate for any meals taken before this.

Please do not ignore this notice.

Yours sincerely,

Head Teacher