

Northcote Primary School Dinner Money and School Meals Debt Policy

Introduction

With effect from 1 April 2023 Northcote School has adopted a NO DEBT policy relating to the provision of school meals and extended services (Breakfast club). This policy concerns the collection of school meals money and the approach to be taken in the cases of debts arising when parents/carers fail to pay for school meals. Parents/carers will be advised a copy of this policy is on the school website.

General Principal

School meals must be paid for in advance. If a pupil is to have meals for the duration of the week monies must be received before the start of that week or in exceptional circumstances if the pupil is having an occasional meal, monies must be received on the day of the meal. 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 in school is used to pay for debts incurred by individual parents / carers. The governing body see this as unacceptable and request that all parents/carers give this policy their full support.

Any subsidies towards school visits that a pupil is entitled to due to good attendance, will not be applied if there are any outstanding dinner money debts.

Free School Meals Entitlement

Pupils will not be provided with a school meal unless it is paid for, except those confirmed as entitled to free school meals. If parents/carers believe that their child(children) may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals they should apply on-line through Liverpool City Council website:

[Liverpool.gov.uk/benefits/free-school-meals](https://liverpool.gov.uk/benefits/free-school-meals)

or alternatively contact the school office who will assist in their application.

As this allowance is a statutory right for qualifying pupils it is important that parents/carers make use of it. The school is only allowed to provide free school meals to pupils where this is officially approved and informed in writing by the Local Authority.

Procedure for Collection of Arrears

It is accepted that on occasion arrears may arise for various reasons. However, arrears cannot be allowed to accumulate. The governing body has therefore agreed the following policy where arrears arise.

- Stage 1 - A gentle reminder letter / text message will be sent home after 1 week of accumulated arrears (Appendix 1).

If you need to discuss any problems with the school regarding the debt then please come into school and discuss immediately.

- Stage 2 – If the debt is not paid and dinner money has gone into further arrears a second letter/text message will be sent by the school office (Appendix 2). This will ask parents to pay the debt by a specified date and ask them to provide a packed lunch until the debt is cleared. If a child comes into school with no packed lunch, and attempts to contact the parents/carers to bring money/packed lunch into school prove unsuccessful, children will not be permitted to request special food orders, for example jacket potatoes/baguettes etc. They will be given the lunch that is on the menu.
- Stage 3 – If there is an outstanding dinner money balance of over £50 per child the Headteacher / Deputy headteacher will contact the parent to ask them to bring the money to school or provide a packed lunch. If this attempt is unsuccessful then children will be given a basic school meal consisting of a standard sandwich and fruit.

This ensures that children do not go hungry, but also ensures that parents/carers understand the severity of the situation and realise that the school will not accept debts to accumulate.

- Stage 4 – If the parents/carers does not comply with any of the options, the Headteacher will send a final letter explaining that the school will begin proceedings against the parent to recover the debt.

We acknowledge 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.

The above measures will be taken even after a child no longer attends the school and they have left not having paid all money owed.

If People are Unable to Pay

The school may reduce or cancel the debt in certain circumstances. A sensitive approach to debt recovery will be carried out, taking the following factors into account:

- Hardship – where paying the debt would cause financial hardship.
- Ill health – where our recovery action may 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.
- Cost – where the value of the debt is less than the cost of recovering it.
- Multiple debts – where someone owes more than one debt to the school. In this situation an attempt to agree one repayment plan to include all debts will be established.

Each case will be reviewed individually by the Finance / Resources Committee and/or Governing Body and a record of all decisions will be retained.

APPENDIX 1



Northcote Primary School

Cavendish Drive, Liverpool, L9 1HW

Headteacher: Mr G Anders

Email: northcote-ao@northcote.liverpool.sch.uk

T: 0151 525 1919

F: 0151 525 1920

Gentle Reminder Letter

Date:

Childs Name:

Dear Parent/Carer

According to our records it appears that there is dinner money outstanding for your child as to today. The amount due for payment is £_____. We would be grateful if you would kindly clear this balance straight away.

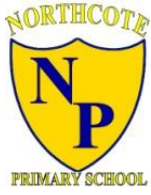
Please pay via your child's account on ParentPay and if you have any queries, please contact the school office.

If you have any difficulty with payment of this amount please let us know immediately and we will endeavour to help.

For information, the last payment shown on our system was made on _____.

Yours sincerely

Mr Gary Anders
Headteacher



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Accumulated Dinner Money Arrears

Date:

Childs Name:

Dear Parent/Carer

We have written to you previously regarding _____'s outstanding dinner money and according to our records, we still have not received any payment. The amount due for payment is £_____ and as per our Dinner Money and School Meals Debt Policy unless we receive payment on Monday morning your child will need a packed lunch until the debt has been paid.

If you have any query or difficulty with payment of this amount, please let us know as soon as possible and we will endeavour to help.

For your information, the last payment shown on our system was made on _____. In case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, we will phone to ask you to pay via Parentpay or to provide sandwiches before lunchtime.

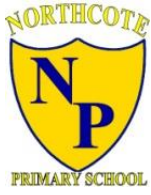
If you have any queries and wish to discuss this matter please contact the school office.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Mr Gary Anders
Headteacher

APPENDIX 3



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T: 0151 525 1919

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Dinner Money Arrears

Date:

Childs Name:

Dear Parent/Carer

As at ___/___/___ our records show a dinner money debt of £_____.

Despite being contacted on other occasions there remains an outstanding debt for dinner money.

As you are aware, parents who receive qualifying benefit are welcome to apply for free school meals with the local authority. If your claim is successful, the Council will then notify the school that your child is entitled to a free meal and our records will be amended accordingly.

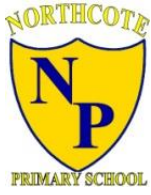
During a recent meeting with our Local Authority Finance Officer we have been challenged about unpaid dinner money arrears and our systems for recouping this debt. I need you to contact Mrs Keary in the school office to discuss an agreed payment plan so that this outstanding debt can be cleared.

I hope you understand the urgency of the matter as school cannot absorb the unpaid dinner money arrears we are currently carrying.

Please contact the school office immediately to discuss and address this matter.

Yours sincerely

Mr Gary Anders
Headteacher



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Dear Parents/Carers

With effect from 1 April 2023 Northcote School has adopted a NO DEBT policy relating to the provision of school meals and extended services (Breakfast club).

If debts are incurred then the school budget has to pay for them and this means money that should be spent on your children's education is used to pay for debts incurred by parents.

I am sure you would not take your child to a restaurant and expect them to be given food without paying for it; the same applies at school. Schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for Free School Meals entitlement. Every other meal and service for which there is a charge must be paid for. Please contact the office if you think your child is eligible for FSM.

The cost of a school dinner is £1.80 per day, £9.00 per week, and AS OF 1st APRIL 2023 WILL BE PAYABLE IN ADVANCE. Parents are expected to pay on a Monday each week via Parentpay.

This is common practice in a vast majority of schools in the area, and countrywide, as dinner money arrears are becoming an ever increasing problem. Currently EYFS and KS1 children are in receipt of Universal Free School meals so this does not apply to them.

Did you know?

The total amount of dinner money currently owed at Northcote School is staggering. It amounts to over £_____. This is money that should be used for YOUR children's education. That is why we have been left with no option but to introduce a debt policy that can be viewed on the school website. We hope that parents will support us with this.

It is very time consuming for the office staff to continually chase dinner money, by letter, phone call and text. It can also be highly embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative effect on the relationships with staff and families.

We acknowledge in these difficult times that some of our families experience financial struggles and in proven circumstances the school will work hard with the family to agree a solution.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the school.

Yours sincerely
Mr Gary Anders
Headteacher