

Achieving Success Together



Mill Green School

SCHOOL MEAL ARREARS POLICY

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Introduction

This policy provides guidance to help Mill Green School manage the collection of school meals income, and procedures to follow when debts arise if parents/carers fail to pay for school meals.

If debts are incurred, then the school budget has to pay for them. This means that money which should be spent on the student's education is used to pay for debts incurred by parents / carers. Every parent / carer will agree that this is unacceptable and we request that all parents / carers give this policy their full support.

This debt management policy in respect of dinner monies includes the refusal to provide a school meal when the parent has not paid or made contact with the school and payment has been outstanding for 4 weeks. This policy is intended to keep debts to a minimum and thereby avoid the cost of a referral to solicitors for legal action or debt collection agency, or to write-off the debt if there is no realistic prospect of debt recovery being successful. This course of action would not be cost-effective with the amounts concerned.

General Information

School meals must be paid for weekly in advance on a Monday morning (or first school day of the week if different). School Meals can be paid for in advance on a monthly or termly basis, if preferred. The amount for the term can be obtained from the Finance Manager. Any change will not be given to any parent/carer whose student is in arrears.

Cheque payments can be accepted, but must be made payable to 'St Helens Council: Mill Green School'.

Dinner registers must be updated accordingly for any student arriving late in a morning.

If a student has forgotten their packed lunch, school will contact the parent / carer and ask them to bring the forgotten lunch into school. However parental/carer consent will be obtained before providing the school will provide the student with a school meal. In the event that consent cannot be obtained, school will offer the student a school meal. The cost of the meal

will be charged to the school account, and therefore Mill Green will seek to recover such cost from the parent/carer.

School Meal Arrears must not be written off at the end of the academic year, they should be carried forward in the registers for the following year.

There will be a requirement for schools to send a list of all students in arrears at the end of each school term to the Local Authority, People's Services Finance Section.

Refunds may be given, where appropriate, out of cash received providing they have been clearly recorded, authorised and receipted. Refunds should only be given in the following circumstances:

- when entitlement to free school meals overlaps a period when the parent/carer has been paying for the meals; and
- when parents/carers have paid for meals termly in advance and are subsequently in credit at the end of the term due to pupil absences.

If payment has been received by cheque, school will wait 2 weeks after depositing the payment before giving any cash refund to ensure that the cheque has cleared at the bank.

Free School Meals

Students will only receive free school meals if they have been confirmed as being entitled to free school meals by the Education Benefits team (confirmation either by inclusion on the official list or telephone call to Education Benefits).

Once a student is removed from the official Free School Meal list the parent/carer must immediately start to pay for their school meals or make alternative provision.

Any apparent gaps in entitlement to free school meals should be checked with the Education Benefits section as sometimes entitlement can be backdated and any arrears therefore cancelled.

Arrears Procedure

A reminder letter / text should be sent to the parent/carer on the first day of non-payment of meals (Appendix 1)

After 5 school days have passed without payment, a further letter should be sent which must include the period of the debt (Appendix 2 – Letter A).

After 10 school days have passed without payment, another letter should be sent by first class post. Again, this letter must include the period of the debt and where arrears are in excess of two weeks and no attempt has been made to reduce the arrears, parents/carers should be informed that they must make alternative arrangements for their child's midday meal until the arrears are cleared (Appendix 3 – Letter B).

If no payment has been received after 15 school days have passed, then the matter should be referred to People's Services Finance for the attention of the Schools Technical Assistant (tel: 01744 671819).

To undertake this, the School Meals Arrears Referral Form (Appendix 5) must be completed and supplied together with copies of the three letters sent (see paragraphs 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3). On receipt, People's Services Finance will endeavour to process the arrears within two weeks (excluding school holidays).

If a parent/carer makes arrangements to pay and the arrears reduce each week then there is no requirement to send the letters detailed above. As long as the outstanding arrears are reducing, and future school meals are paid for in advance, school meals can continue to be provided.

Copies should be kept of all letters sent along with a record of dates and notes of any conversations held.

Once a parent/carer has been invoiced by the Council no further attempts at recovering the debt should be made by the school and no payments should be accepted by the school against this invoice. Methods of payment as stated on the invoice should be followed. A copy of the invoice will be sent to the school at which point the school should enter a credit to the value of the invoice on the dinner register against the child's name, and adjust the debit balance b/fwd on the Provision of School Meals and Milk form with supporting details (i.e. invoice number).

If the parent/carer insists on paying at school, school will need to check with People's Services Finance for how to proceed.

If the parent/carer requests that the child goes back onto paid school meals then the school must check with People's Services Finance that the previous arrears have been cleared.

If school becomes aware of any change in circumstances for a family which may have contributed to the non-payment of school meals, the family should be referred to the appropriate agencies e.g. Education Benefits Section, Education Welfare Service etc.

Once the Council's Income Section have exhausted all methods of recovering the outstanding arrears, the corporate Debt Recovery Policy will be followed to recover the debt. If the matter does proceed to court there may be a requirement for a representative from the school to attend and give evidence.

In addition to these procedures, schools may wish to contact parents/carers by telephone or speak face to face to discuss arrangements to pay. Reminder messages may also be sent by the school's text messaging service.

Leavers

If a student transfers to another school:

- the school will contact the new school if it is within the borough of St Helens and inform them of the level of arrears;
- the school will issue a letter to the parent/guardian requesting the arrears are cleared using first class post (Appendix 4 – Letter C)
- if a child leaves no forwarding address, the new school should be contacted to request that the letter is passed on to the parent/guardian; and
- if no payment is received within 10 school days of the child leaving, the debt should be referred to the People's Services Finance Section.

NB. The school meal debt does not transfer with the child.

Adult / Staff Meals

A member of staff requiring a school meal should be entered their request on the Staff Meals sheet at the school office before 10.00am.

Staff meals paid by the individual should be collected on a weekly basis and paid into the Council's account via the cash income system.

Any staff member who is in meal arrears will be declined the opportunity for a staff meal until the debt is cleared.

Provision of School Meals Reconciliation Sheets

The reconciliation sheets must be completed on a weekly basis and returned to LA's People's Services Finance.

If free school meals are awarded and backdated, any arrears in the dinner register need to be adjusted and the number of free/paid meals adjusted appropriately on the Provision of School Meals and Milk form.

Banking Arrangements

Registers should be accurately completed, up to date and be reviewed and signed by the Headteacher on a weekly basis.

Total cash collected and banked should reconcile to the school meal records.

Every half term the Headteacher should confirm that income received reconciles to the bank paying in records and evidence undertaking this review on the banking slip.

Monies should be banked on a regular basis, at least weekly, and large amounts of monies should not be left in the safe over the weekend.

Cash income forms should be completed and sent to the Income Section as soon as possible after completion.

Reminder Letter

STUDENT'S NAME: _____

CLASS: _____

Date:

Dear Parent/Guardian

School meals must be paid for in advance on Monday mornings (or first school day of the week if different). School Meals are currently £ _____ per day.

Please send in £_____ dinner money tomorrow. If you have any queries please contact the school office. Cheques must be made payable to 'St Helens Council'.

Yours sincerely

School Business Manager

Letter A – After non-payment for 5 school days

<Parent/Guardian full name>

<Address line 1>

<Address line 2>

<Address line 3>

<Address line 4>

Date: < **/**/ ** >

Dear <Parent/Guardian's name>

Further to our reminder letter dated < **/**/ ** >, our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child <Name> for the period < **/**/ ** > to < **/**/ ** >.

School meals currently cost < £**.** > and must be paid for in advance on a Monday morning.

As at < **/**/ ** > your account is showing arrears of < £**.** >.

Please make arrangements to pay the outstanding arrears immediately. If you have any problems in making this payment please contact the school office.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

Letter B – After non-payment for 10 school days

<Parent/Guardian full name>
<Address line 1>
<Address line 2>
<Address line 3>
<Address line 4>

Date: < **/**/ ** >

Dear <Parent/Guardian's name>

Further to our previous correspondence, our records show that you have not yet cleared dinner money arrears for your child <Name> despite a previous written request on < **/**/ ** >.

As at < **/**/ ** > your account is showing arrears of < £**.** > for the period < **/**/ ** > to < **/**/ ** >.

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately.

I must inform you that if payment is not received within 5 working days of the date of this letter, the school reserves the right to refer your debt to the Council's Debt Recovery Section.

I am obliged to warn you that the debt recovery procedure can result in a summons to Court.

We need to ensure that all payments are up-to-date and I am afraid that if the debt is not cleared by the end of this week it will not be possible to provide your child with a school meal. Therefore from <Date> you will need to make arrangements for your child's lunch by providing a healthy packed lunch.

It is with regret that this debt has caused action to be taken. Should you wish to discuss any issue regarding this debt please contact the school.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

Letter C – School Leavers

<School Letterhead>

<Parent/Guardian full name>
<Address line 1>
<Address line 2>
<Address line 3>
<Address line 4>

Date: < **/ **/ ** >

Dear <Parent/Guardian's name>

According to our records <Name> left this school on < **/ **/ ** >. At this date your school meals account is in arrears by <£**.**> for the period < **/ **/ ** > to < **/ **/ ** >.

Please make arrangements to pay the outstanding arrears immediately. I must inform you that if payment is not received within 10 working days of the date of this letter I will have to refer you to the Council's Debt Recovery Section.

I am obliged to warn you that the debt recovery procedure can result in a summons to Court.

{ School transfers within St Helens borough only – for information purposes, the details of this debt will be forwarded to your child's new school. }

Should you wish to discuss any issue regarding this debt please contact the school.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

School Meals Arrears Referral Form**SCHOOL:** _____

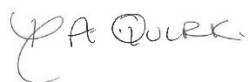
Debtor Details: (Person responsible for the payment of meals)	
Title: (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Other)	
Forenames(s):	
Surname(s):	
Address Line 1:	
Address Line 2:	
Address Line 3:	
Address Line 4:	
Postcode:	
Telephone Number:	
Mobile Number:	
Child(ren)'s Name(s):	
Amount of debt:	
Full period of debt:	

Signed
(Headteacher)



Date: 03.09.2024

Signed
(Chair of Governors)



Date: 03.09.2024

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