



Debt Recovery Policy for Parents

Introduction

The Governing Body has a duty to ensure the school receives all the funds to which it is entitled. This policy has been created to ensure the appropriate procedures are in place to deal with debts and the recovery of assets. It encompasses all debts owed to the school including, but not limited to, payments for goods, services, school trips and school meal payments. This policy has been compiled recognising the difficulties placed on school in balancing the social welfare of pupils with the responsibility of managing the School Budget.

Rationale

This policy is fair and just and sets out a clear procedure for families. By introducing a zero tolerance debt policy, we aim to reduce the risk of parents incurring large debts that they will struggle to pay and minimise the amount of staff time taken chasing up outstanding payments.

The School is responsible for managing payments and arrears for school services; these are processed through the main school budget. Where debts are incurred, the school budget has to pay for them; this means that money that 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.

School Meals

The School is under a duty to provide free school meals to those who are eligible, but there is no obligation beyond this. If arrears exist, the School can refuse to continue to provide meals. You do not have to pay for school lunches if you receive any of the following:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit, provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual income (as assessed by HM Revenue and Customs) that does not exceed £16,190
- Working Tax Credit 'run-on' – the payment someone may receive for a further four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

Further information about applying for a free school meal is available at the Local Authority website: <https://www.bury.gov.uk/Residents/Education-and-schools/School-meals/Free-school-meals.aspx>

Parents, please note: it is your responsibility to apply for free school meals and to ensure that the Local Authority is kept up-to-date with your circumstances.

Currently infant children (reception, year 1 and year 2 pupils) are entitled to a Universal Infant Free School Meal. This is not the same as a free school meal from the Local Authority.

The School provides a number of other services, these include nursery, before and after school care, and residential school trips. All payments for chargeable services should be made in advance using the School Money online payment system or at a Pay Point store.

Payments of Services

Parents are required to pay for all services provided by the school in advance by making an online payment to their child's account on the School Money system or at any shop displaying the Pay Point logo. On the School Money system, separate payment items are listed for every child, for example, lunches, out of school club, nursery and PGL.

If you have any difficulty accessing the system please contact the school office immediately.

Debt Recovery

Where payment for services is not received in advance and arrears accumulate longer than one week, the following procedures apply:

1. If a child's account is in arrears of one week a text message will be sent to parents or carers as a gentle reminder to make a payment as soon as possible. This reminder is automatically generated by the online payment system.
2. If a payment is not received within a further week a second message via text, email or letter will be sent asking for immediate payment including a request for the parent/carer to contact the school. This provides an opportunity for parents or carers to discuss the matter in more detail with a member of the office team who will be able to assist with any issues or difficulties that a parent or carer may be experiencing in making payments.
3. If necessary, parents or carers are able to set up a payment plan to bring the arrears up-to-date by contacting the School Business Manager. If payments agreed in the Payment Plan (sufficient enough to cover the ongoing weekly costs and pay off the debts for all services) are made on time, the service will continue.

4. If regular payments are not made, the child's service will be withdrawn and the debt will be passed onto the debt recovery team at Bury Metropolitan Council where legal proceeding may begin.

School Lunches - Although meal arrears are not a viable or sustainable position for school we ask that parents contact the school office as soon as possible to enable us to agree a solution which is not to the detriment of their child. Parents will be asked to provide a packed lunch until debts are paid in full. School meals will be reinstated once the arrears have been paid in full.

Out of School Club – Please note that Out of School Club care will be suspended if a child's account remains in debt and parents and carers will be asked to make alternative arrangements for out of school care.

Nursery provision – Paid for nursery care will be suspended if a child's account remains in debt and parents and carers will be asked to make alternative arrangements for care. Service will be reinstated once the arrears have been paid in full.

School Support

We hope that by implementing this policy, we are able to help you, as parents, manage your payments better and, at the same time, ensure that our available budget is used to enhance your children's learning. The chasing of debts is also extremely time-consuming for our staff. Time spent checking debts and sending out letters takes our staff away from other duties at school that would benefit all children. We request that all parents and carers work with us to avoid unnecessary time spent chasing debts by making regular payments, in advance, for our services.

Linked Policy: Charges and Remissions Policy

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