Oakfield Primary School

Dinner Money Debt Recovery Policy

Date policy adopted: 1st September 2026

Date due for review: 31st August 2027

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1. **Confirmation that the Dinner Money Debt Recovery Policy in respect of Oakfield Primary School has been discussed and formerly adopted by the full governing body.**

Signed by:

Chair of Governors:

Date: 08/11/2026

Print name: Deri Hollywell

Headteacher:

Date: 08/11/2026

Print name: Lynn Cooney

Agreed at the full governing body meeting on: 08/11/2026

2. Introduction

This policy concerns the collection of school meals money and the approach to be taken in cases of debts arising when parent/carers fail to pay for school meals. Parents/Carers will be sent a copy of this policy when their children reach Key Stage 2 (KS2).

All pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 are entitled to receive Universal Infant Free School meals.

3. General Principle

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 in advance of, or during that week.

If the school is to accept pupils having an occasional meal, monies must be received during that week.

If debts are incurred, these have to be paid from the school budget. This means that money which should be spent on all pupils' 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.

The school will take all reasonable steps to recover debts arising from traded activities whilst ensuring that debt recovery procedures are fair, proportionate and consistently applied.

All debt recovery activities will be undertaken in accordance with:

- the School's Financial Regulations;
- the Scheme of Delegation;
- relevant legislation and guidance;

The school will endeavour to collect payments in advance wherever possible in order to minimise the risk of bad debt.

A debt will only be written off where all reasonable recovery actions have been exhausted, and the appropriate approval has been obtained in accordance with this policy.

4. Free School Meals

KS2 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 contact the school or complete an online application form on the Local Authority website.

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 entitlement has been verified.

5. **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 School Business Manager will maintain appropriate records for all outstanding debts. Records will include the debtor's name, pupil name (where applicable), nature of the debt, amount outstanding, dates of services provided, payment due dates, details of reminder notices issued, correspondence, repayment agreements and any recovery action taken. Copies of all letters and records of verbal communications will be retained to provide a clear audit trail.

The governing body has therefore agreed the following policy where arrears arise.

An initial reminder may be informal and can be made either in person (when a parent/guardian comes to collect/drop off the child, by way of discussion or by telephone. In general, the person responsible for maintaining the account will notify the parent / guardian. The date of the initial reminder should be recorded, or a gentle reminder letter / text message will be sent home after one week in excess of £5 accumulated arrears (Appendix 1).

The parent/carer will be informed in writing where two weeks in excess of £10 arrears has accumulated and advised to make immediate payment (Appendix 2).

A final letter to the parent/carer informing them that no meals will be provided for their child/children if payment has not been received by a specified date in accordance with the policy, the date when four weeks of arrears have been accumulated (Appendix 3)

Any parent/guardian experiencing financial difficulty may make a claim for the remission of charges which should be addressed to the Headteacher and will be considered confidentially on an individual basis.

No meals to be provided to pupils when arrears exceed four weeks in excess of £10.

Once the final letter deadline has expired the Governing Body will refer the matter to the school's legal advisers.

6. **Negotiation of repayment terms**

Parents/Carers are expected to settle the amount owed by a single payment as soon as possible after receiving the first 'overdue payment' reminder.

However, if people are unable to pay or where they may request permission to settle the debt by instalments and extend the normal terms and conditions they must submit an application in writing explaining the reasons for their inability to meet the original contract terms.

The Headteacher and School Business manager will agree the revised terms of payment. The School may reduce or cancel a 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 might 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 debt - 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.

A record of all such agreements entered into will be retained. In all cases, a letter will be issued to the Parents/Carers confirming the agreed terms for repayment. The settlement period should be the shortest that is judged reasonable.

The Finance Committee will decide whether any Parents/Carers is granted extended settlement terms. Where a repayment arrangement is agreed, consideration will be given to whether the parent/carer should continue to receive services on credit. The school may require future payments to be made in advance or may restrict access to chargeable services until arrears are cleared. Any such decision will be documented and retained on file. This decision and its basis will

7. **Cost of debt recovery**

Where the school incurs material additional costs in recovering a debt then the Headteacher/ Full Governing Body will decide whether to seek to recover such costs from the debtor. The debtor will be formally advised in writing that they will be required to pay the additional costs incurred by the school in recovering the debt.

8. **Bad debts**

Write-off of any debt requires the written approval of the Full Governing Body.

A record of the write-off, the reason for it, and the approval for it, will be retained for 7 years.

9. Monitoring arrangements

The Senior Administrator monitors debt levels and ensures compliance with this policy.

Outstanding debts will be reviewed on a termly basis and reported to the Finance Committee. The review will consider the total value of outstanding debts, aged debt balances, repayment arrangements in place, debts proposed for write-off and the effectiveness of debt recovery procedures. Where debt levels are considered excessive, appropriate action will be agreed to reduce financial risk to the school.

APPENDIX 1

Date

Gentle Reminder Letter

Child's name:

Dear Parent/Carer

According to our records there are outstanding dinner monies for your child/children.

The arrears are for the week commencing .....

Please make the payment of £ ..... tomorrow.

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

Yours sincerely

Headteacher/ School Business Manager

APPENDIX 2

Date:

Accumulated School Meals Arrears

Child's name:

Dear Parent/Carer

Following our letter dated ..... regarding outstanding dinner money, our records show that this has not been paid.

To date, the amount of arrears is £..... We now request that you attend a meeting to discuss the situation with the Headteacher. Please telephone the school office to arrange an appointment.

Until the debt is cleared, you must provide a packed lunch for your child/children. In a case when payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, we will phone to ask you to come to school with either the money or a packed lunch before lunch time.

These arrears need to be cleared as soon as possible. Payment can be made via the online payment system, in cash or by cheque made payable to school name.

Any parent/carer experiencing financial difficulty may make a claim for the remission of charges which should be addressed to the Headteacher and will be considered confidentially on an individual basis.

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

Yours sincerely

Headteacher/ School Business Manager

APPENDIX 3

Date:

Non-payment of school dinner money arrears

Child's name:

Dear Parent/Carer

Our records show that you have not cleared the school dinner money arrears for your child/children despite previous letters sent home on ..... and .....

Arrears to date total £ .....

Following the school policy on dinner money debt recovery, a copy of which was sent to you when your child started school/started in KS2, I must inform you that if payment is not received with 5 working days, the Governing Body will be asked to consider starting legal proceedings for debt recovery. I am obliged to warn you that the debt recovery procedure can result in a summons to Court.

Until the debt is cleared no meals will be provided in school and you need to provide a packed lunch for your child/children.

Any parent/guardian experiencing financial difficulty may make a claim for the remission of charges which should be addressed to the Headteacher and will be considered confidentially on an individual basis.

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

Yours sincerely

Headteacher/ School Business Manager