



**East Anglia Schools Trust**  
Achieving Success Together

# School Meals Debt Policy

<b>Version control</b>		<b>Drafted / Amended / Approved by</b>
1.0	24/1/18	Simon Gray, Trust Business Manager

<b>To be reviewed</b>	Annually
<b>By</b>	Business Manager, in conjunction with the Finance Manager, and with approval by the Operations Committee and Directors.
<b>Next review date</b>	Spring term 2019

This policy has been written to help our Trust adopt a consistent approach to debt incurred by parents whose children take school dinners. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

The Free School Meals system is there for parents of children of all ages to claim if they are in receipt of certain benefits, and all pupils in the EYFS and KS1 are now entitled to receive Universal Infant Free School Meals.

**Therefore, this policy only relates to pupils in Key Stage 2 (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) whose parents pay for school meals.**

The Trust wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals which they then find difficult to clear.

The Trustees feel that a 'no debt' approach should be adopted, as parents must realise the Trust can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for FSM or UIFSM entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for. Our Parentmail cashless collection system highlights debt immediately so keeping track is easy.

It is time consuming for the Trust's finance staff to continually chase parents for payment - by letter, phone call or in person. It is also highly embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative effect on our relationships with families. However, the Trust is no different than any other café / restaurant and meals taken must be paid for.

The Trust will make parents aware of this policy in the following ways:

- A letter to parents;
- Reminders in the Junior school newsletter;
- The Junior school website.

This will ensure that all parents get the same message in a consistent way, and will be done at least once each year. All parents should be reminded about the policy when their child joins KS2. **The letter to parents is attached as Appendix 1.**

### **Key Information**

1. All school lunches must be paid for in advance
2. No child should be sent to school without money in their account and expect a meal
3. Where a debt has accrued amounting to £11 (5 meals), parents will be asked to provide packed lunches from home until the debt has been cleared

### **Debt recovery implementation**

This approach compliments and adds to the general procedures outlined in the '**East Anglia Schools Trust – Bad Debt**' policy. A weekly check should be undertaken as follows: -

#### **£2 - £10 debt**

- Debt report checked
- A reminder letter / text will be issued to all parents reminding them to top up account

#### **£11 debt to £25**

- A reminder letter will be issued to all relevant parents asking them to top up their account before any further meals are ordered and to send their child to school with a packed lunch (appendix 2)

#### **£26 plus**

- A letter will be issued to parents asking that debt be cleared within 7 days or that legal action will be considered. Parents will again be asked not to order any meals until their account is in credit and to send their child to school with a packed lunch (appendix 3)

Appendix 1 – letter to **all** parents

Dear Parents / Carers

**School meals debt recovery policy – Key Stage 2 children**

Due to an increase in the number of school meals that are regularly not being paid for and to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals, East Anglia Schools Trust has, like many schools and Multi-Academy Trusts, decided to adopt a '**no debt**' policy relating to payment for school meals in Cliff Park Junior school.

We hope that all parents will give this policy their full support.

School meals must be paid for in advance using our online payment system at [www.parentmail.co.uk](http://www.parentmail.co.uk) (please contact us if you are unable to load funds into the system for some reason, and we will help).

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school will grant a debt allowance of 5 meals. However, this debt must be cleared and the account topped up as soon as possible.

If the debt is not cleared, parents **must** provide a packed lunch.

If the debt rises and payment is not received within 1 week of the final reminder letter, we will be forced to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt.

If you believe you may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals, please contact the office for more details. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. We will help you all we can with your application.

By implementing this debt policy, we are aiming to help parents manage school dinner money better and to ensure that money given to the school for educational purposes is spent in the correct way.

If you have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Mrs L Watkins  
Head of School  
Cliff Park Junior School

Appendix 2 – dinner money letter 1

**Dinner Money Balances**

We have checked the balance on your child's dinner money account today and unfortunately this now amounts to £xx

As stated in East Anglia Schools Trust's 'School Meals Debt Policy', all school meals must be paid for in advance using our Parentmail online payment system (unless you have made alternative arrangements with us) and we must therefore ask you to clear the outstanding balance and top up your child's account before any further meals are taken.

**If your child orders a further meal, we will unfortunately have no choice but to telephone to ask you to provide a packed lunch. We do not like doing this as it causes embarrassment to both parties, and we therefore ask that you clear the account so this can be avoided.**

If you believe you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for more details. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. We will help you all we can with your application.

We look forward to receiving your payment, however if you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs L Watkins  
Head of School  
Cliff Park Junior School

Appendix 3 - dinner money letter 2

**Dinner Money Balances**

We have checked the balance on your child's dinner money account today and unfortunately this now amounts to £xx

As stated in East Anglia Schools Trust's 'School Meals Debt Policy', all school meals must be paid for in advance using our Parentmail online payment system (unless you have made alternative arrangements with us) and we must therefore ask you to clear the outstanding balance within the next 7 days and top up your child's account before any further meals are taken.

If your child orders a further meal, we will unfortunately have no choice but to telephone to ask you to provide a packed lunch. We do not like doing this as it causes embarrassment to both parties, and we therefore ask that you clear the account so that this can be avoided.

**If payment is not received within 7 days we will unfortunately have to refer the debt for recovery under debt recovery procedures. We must implement our policy as we have to ensure that the money given to the school for educational purposes is spent in the correct way.**

If you believe you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for more details. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. We will help you all we can with your application.

We look forward to receiving your payment, however if you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs L Watkins  
Head of School  
Cliff Park Junior School