



School Meal Debt Policy

January 2024
This policy will be reviewed annually.

Heron Primary School

School Meal Debt Policy 2023-2024

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1. INTRODUCTION

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

We fully understand and greatly appreciate that many parents/carers keep a close eye on their Parentmail balance and make regular, timely payments.

All pupils in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 (Years 1 and 2) are entitled to Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM), therefore this policy only relates to pupils in Key Stage 2 (Years 3,4,5 and 6) whose parents pay for school meals. When a child moves into KS2 school meals become chargeable.

The Free School Meals (FSM) system is there for parents of children of **all ages (even KS1 children who are entitled to UIFSM)** to claim if they are in receipt of certain benefits. Parents can apply for FSM using a secure, confidential online form at <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals>. It is important that those parents who are entitled apply for FSM, even if they do not intend to actually take the meals, as the school receives funding when a successful application is made.

2. INTENT

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

It is very time consuming for the school's office staff to chase parents for payment by letter, email, phone call, text message or in person. It is also highly embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative effect on our relationship with families.

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

- A letter to all parents
- The policy section of the school website
- In information packs provided to new parents when children join the school.

This will ensure that all parents get the same message in a consistent way. All parents will be reminded of the policy when their child moves from Year 2 into Year 3 when Universal Infant Free School Meals entitlement will end.

The headteacher will provide the Governing Body with details of any outstanding dinner money debt and the current position with regard to such debt at the relevant meeting/s of the Governing Body. It is the Governing Body's responsibility to ensure that this policy is applied fairly and consistently in order that the school budget is used to provide for children's learning and not to pay costs incurred by non-payment of school dinners.

3. KEY INFORMATION

1. All school lunches must be paid for in advance
2. Parents/carers must not send a child to school with no money on their account and expect their child to be given a meal
3. Where a debt has accrued amounting to £10.50 or more, parents will be asked to provide packed lunches from home until the debt has been cleared
4. Parents who do not want their child to have a school meal should provide a packed lunch

4. Debt Recovery Policy Implementation

The school will make weekly checks on Parentmail balances.

Any negative balance up to £10.50

- A reminder email / text will be issued reminding parents to top up their account.

Letter 1: A debt of £12.60 or more

- A reminder letter will be issued asking parents to top up their ParentPay account before any further meals are ordered and to send their child to school with a packed lunch until the debt is cleared.

Letter 2: If debt is still outstanding 14 days after Letter 1 issued

- A letter will be issued asking that the debt be cleared within a further 7 days. 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. If debt is not cleared within the further 7 days, the debt will be reported to the Heron board of Governors.

Appendices

1. Reminder Text

This is a reminder that your Parentmail account has a balance of <balance>. In accordance with our school dinner debt policy, please top up your account as soon as possible. Thank you.

2. Letter 1

Dear Parent

Re: School Meal Payment for <Name>

We are writing to inform you that as of <DATE> there is an outstanding balance of <AMOUNT> for school meals on your child's Parentmail account.

As you will be aware, all school meals must be paid for in advance using Parentmail. We must therefore ask you to clear the outstanding balance within the next 14 days and top up your child's account before any further meals are taken. If you wish to pay by cheque or cash, please contact the office.

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

If you believe that you may qualify for Free School Meals, please apply using the secure, confidential online form at <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals>. 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 prompt payment.

Yours sincerely,

Letter 2

Dear Parent

Re: School Meal Payment for <Name>

We have provided school meals for <NAME> this year however we have not received a response to our previous letter dated <DATE>. The outstanding balance on <DATE> is <AMOUNT>.

As stated in our School Meal Debt Policy, all school meals must be paid for in advance using Parentmail. We must ask you to clear the outstanding balance within the next 7 days and to top up your child's account before any further meals are taken. If you wish to pay by cheque or cash, please contact the office.

If your child orders a further meal we will unfortunately have no choice but to telephone you to ask you to provide a packed lunch. We do not like doing this as it causes embarrassment to all involved. We must therefore ask you to clear the account so that this can be avoided. For more information, please see our School Meal Debt Policy, which can be found on our website or obtained from the school office.

If payment is not received within the next 7 days we will pass the matter to Heron board of Governors. We must implement our policy as we have to ensure that the school budget is used to provide for children's learning and not to pay costs incurred by non-payment of school dinners.

If you believe that you may qualify for Free School Meals, please apply using the secure, confidential online form at <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals>. 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 prompt payment.

Yours sincerely,