**ST. BEDE’S CATHOLIC JUNIOR SCHOOL**

*celebrates life and learning*

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**SCHOOL DINNER MONEY DEBT MANAGEMENT**

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| **APPROVED BY:** | **GOVERNING BODY** |
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**SCHOOL DINNER MONEY DEBT MANAGEMENT POLICY**

**MISSION STATEMENT**

**St. Bede, patron of our school, wrote:**

 ***“It was always my delight to learn and to teach”.***

We are a celebrating community, living the
Gospel Values, committed to educating children
in the light of the Catholic Faith.

**We journey together so that we**

***“Might have life - life in all its fullness”.***

**John 10:10**

**RATIONALE**

The responsibility of ensuring school meal payments are made by parents/carers lies with the school. In addition, Mellors Catering cannot and will not sustain any debts outstanding. Therefore, a policy is required to ensure school meal debts are kept to a minimum.

As a school, we want all pupils to achieve their full potential and live out the mission of the school to ‘live life in all its fullness’, however, if debts are incurred, then the school budget has to pay for them. This means that money which 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.

In writing this policy, the Governors of St. Bede’s Catholic Junior School plan to implement one that ensures meals are paid for, whilst aiding parents/carers during financial difficulties and ensuring children still receive a school meal, if requested, at lunchtime.

**PROCEDURES**

School meals must be paid for in advance of meals being taken. All meals for the period being paid for must be paid in advance online. Meals may be paid for on a daily, weekly, half termly or termly basis. If parents choose to pay either half termly or termly and a debt arises at the end of that period, the parent/carer will be contacted by the office to ensure the payments are brought up to date.

Children must know which lunch option they will have each day. If choosing school meals their lunch account should be in credit. If a pupil has a school meal every day, it will be assumed that on ‘promotion’ days they will take that meal. Parents/carers will need to advise the school office if that is not the case.

If a pupil does not have meals every day the parents/carers will need to logon and pay the school meal via their account.

If you think that your child may be eligible to receive free school meals, please contact Halton Borough Council for further advice and guidance: 0303 333 4300 or online

<https://www3.halton.gov.uk/Pages/EducationandFamilies/Schools/FreeSchoolMeals.aspx>

**PROCEDURES**

In collecting any outstanding debts, a step-by-step process will be followed so as that the management of school dinner money debt is equitable. The time lapse between the steps will normally be five school days. However, this may vary depending on factors such as the level of debt and the time period within a term.

A text/email message is sent informing parent/carer that their child has ordered a school meal that has not yet been paid for. If after 3 days, no payment has been made or contact not made by the parent/carer the following steps will be taken.

**Step one**: A letter will be emailed to the parent/carer asking them to make immediate payment and reminding them of the policy that meals need to be paid for in advance (Appendix A).

**Step two**: A telephone call will be made to the parent/carer to ask for the debt to be settled as soon as possible. If we are unable to contact the parent/carer then we will proceed to step three within 3 days. If a parent/carer is unable to make the payment immediately, school are able to offer a payment plan, however it will be necessary for the child to bring a packed lunch to school, to avoid the debt increasing further.

**Step three:** For those debts which received ‘debt letter one’ the previous week and have not been cleared or have not responded to the telephone call, ‘debt letter two’ will be sent via email. This letter requests that the child is provided with a packed lunch until the debt is cleared, the School Office will ensure this is adhered to – if the child arrives at School without a packed lunch, the parent/carer will be telephoned but the school will offer to provide a basic school meal for the same price £2.70. This basic meal will be a sandwich, piece of fruit, a yoghurt and a drink of juice (Appendix B).

**Step four:** For those debts which received ‘debt letter two’ the previous week and have not been cleared, the school will contact the parent by telephone to arrange an appointment even if the pupil has not actually taken any further school meals. If we are unable to make contact by telephone, a letter will be sent home, asking the parent/carer to contact school to make an appointment to come and speak with the Headteacher (Appendix C).

**Step five:** If after all of the above steps have been taken and the debt is still outstanding, this will be referred to the Governing Body, who will look at taking the outstanding debt to the small claims court. A letter will be issued to the parent/carer advising of this action (Appendix D).

We acknowledge that on occasion, families have financial difficulties and in these proven circumstances, the school will work hard with the family to agree a solution which is not to the detriment of the child.

In the event of a child leaving St Bede’s Catholic Junior School with an outstanding debt, the Governing Body will need to consider whether to write off this debt or pursue payment by other means including making a claim in the Small Claims Court.

**APPENDIX A (Debt Letter one)**

Date :

Dear Parent/Carer

Re: School Meal Payments for St Bedes Junior Catholic School.

Dinner Money Rate: Daily £2.70/Weekly £13.50

According to our records………….. has been taking school meals recently. It appears that we have not received sufficient money to cover this cost, despite message reminders to pay.

The outstanding balance is £

I would be grateful if payment could be sent in as soon as possible, including monies for the forthcoming week/half term/term if this is relevant.

This is a standardised letter that we send out, whenever dinner money is owed and I recognise this is likely to be an oversite however, I would be grateful if you could arrange for prompt payment of this outstanding debt since the school is unable to provide credit for school meals.

Due to the ever-increasing debts owing for children’s dinners, I must remind all parents that it is imperative that payment for meals is made promptly to the school, in advance of meals being taken.

If payment is not received there is a possibility that the school may not provide lunch for your child/children as the school may be liable for any debt that arises.

Schools cannot provide free meals to children who are not entitled to them.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Faith Housley

Headteacher

**Appendix B (Debt Letter Two)**

Date :

Dear Parent/Carer

Re: School Meals

I am writing to advise you that there is still an outstanding balance of ……………… on …………………………………………………. dinner money account.

It is school’s policy that the school does not pay for dinners on behalf of the children. As a result of this, I need to advise you that the school will be unable to provide a dinner for ……………………………… until this debt is cleared.

Please ensure……………………………………… is provided with a packed lunch until this debt is cleared; school dinners can then re-commence.

If ………………. does not bring a packed lunch to school, then an emergency meal will be provided, consisting of a sandwich, fruit, yoghurt and a drink and still charged the school meal rate of £2.70. This will also be recorded as a safeguarding concerning.

If you wish to discuss this further, then please do not hesitate to contact me. I enclose a copy of the school’s Dinner Money Debt Policy and procedures for your information.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Faith Housley

Headteacher

**Appendix C: (Invite to discuss with Headteacher)**

Date:

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: School Meals

You will recall that I wrote to you last week regarding the outstanding balance on …………………………….. dinner money account to the value of £……………….

As you know, it is the policy that the school does not pay for dinners on behalf of the children.

I am disappointed that you have not settle the debt and would request that you telephone the office to make an appointment to see me to discuss this further.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely

Faith Housley

Headteacher

**Appendix D: DINNER MONEY DEBT ESCALATION**

Date:

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: School Meals

I am disappointed you have been unable to contact me to make arrangements to recover the outstanding debt of ……………………………

In line with the school’s Dinner Money Debt Management Policy and procedures, a copy of which was sent to you with a previous letter, I have no option but to refer this outstanding debt to the school Governors.

The School Governors will consider the situation and will contact you in due course over the action they will take, which could include making a claim in the small claims court.

Yours sincerely

Faith Tiernan

Head Teacher