



School Meal Arrears Policy

Signed:

Date: February 2024

Review Date: February 2025

School Meal Arrears Policy

This Policy recognises the difficulties placed on St Mary's Catholic Primary School in balancing the social welfare of pupils to provide nourishing and healthy hot meals, with the management of the school budget.

We ask that each child's dinner money account is paid in advance via ParentPay or by cash or cheque in exceptional circumstances to the school office. If the dinner money account is not in credit, the child will be provided with a school meal in good faith and on the assumption that payment will be made by the next day. The school office will notify the parent / carer that a meal has been taken and that payment is required, unless the child is entitled to free school meals.

If school meal arrears are incurred, then the school budget has to pay for them. This means that money, which should be spent on children's education, is used to pay for debts incurred by parents/carers. This is unacceptable and we request that all parents/carers give this policy their full support.

Parents/carers whose child takes a school lunch must pay the relevant cost stated by the schools catering supplier. Pupils may be eligible for free school meals where a parent / carer is in receipt of the following:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit - if you apply on or after 1 April 2018 your household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you get)

Procedures for payment of arrears are as follows:

1. On the Wednesday of week one – an email will be sent home advising of the arrears and requesting payment by the following Monday.
2. On the Monday of week two – a letter (letter 1) will be sent home with the child advising of the level of arrears, requesting payment is made by that Wednesday and that a packed lunch should be provided until the account has been settled and setting out the eligibility for receiving Free School Meals. (<https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals/cheshire-east>)
3. On the Thursday of week two – a telephone call will be made to the parent/carers requesting payment of the amount outstanding, requesting that a packed lunch is provided until the account is settled and to agree a payment plan.
4. On the Monday of week three – a second letter (Letter 2) will be sent home with the child advising of the level of arrears, requesting payment is made with immediate effect and that a packed lunch is provided until the account is cleared. The letter will also set out the eligibility for Free School Meals and that the debt if not settled will be referred to Cheshire East Council Debt Recovery Team.

5. Once all attempts to collect the outstanding dinner money have been exhausted and no payment plan or meeting with the parents/carers has been made, the decision will be made as to whether legal action will be taken to recover the outstanding debt. The following details need to be provided:
 - School Name
 - Pupil Name (in full)
 - Parents/Guardian name and address
 - Arrears to be recovered
 - Specific dates to which the arrears relate
 - Statement printed out from ParentPay software, with details of meals taken
 - Copy of correspondence sent to parents/carers

6. Where a pupil(s) transfer to another school within the Local Authority, the school should contact the new school to advise them that outstanding arrears.