



South East Cornwall Multi Academy Regional Trust

School Meal Debt Policy

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Contents

Policy	3
Introduction	3
Purpose	3
Procedure	3
Payment for School Meals	3
Free School Meal Entitlement	3
Management of School Debt	4

Policy

Introduction

This policy outlines the procedures and guidance regarding the management of school meal debts to ensure a consistent approach. It provides clarity and consistency and will help parents/carers clearly understand expectations and their responsibilities.

Purpose

The purpose of a school meal debt policy is to balance the needs of students in the provision of meals, the financial sustainability of the school, and compliance with regulations, while promoting transparency, equity, and fairness for all stakeholders involved.

Procedure

Payment for School Meals

All parents/carers have access to the Trust's online payment system, ParentPay as a method of paying for all school meals, trips, and services. It is the responsibility of parents/carers to regularly check the available balance on the student's ParentPay account to ensure there are sufficient funds to pay for a school meal each day.

If for any reason there are issues with access to ParentPay, the parents/carers should contact the Finance Office/ School Secretary at the school for assistance. Barcodes are available for those who do not use/have access to the online ParentPay portal.

Free School Meal Entitlement

The free school meals system is available for parents of students in Key Stage 2, 3 and 4 (Years 3 to 11) if they are in receipt of certain benefits. All students in Reception and Key Stage 1 qualify for a free meal under the Universal Infant Free School Meal scheme.

If a parent/carer is suffering temporary financial problems, it is important that they inform the school as soon as they feel able. All conversations will be treated with strict confidentiality.

If parents/carers believe that their child/ren may qualify for entitlement to free school meals they should contact Cornwall Council's free school meals team on 01872 323298 or apply online at <http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/schoolmeals>. This allowance is a statutory right for qualifying students, and it is important that parents/carers make use of it. Schools are only allowed to provide free school meals to students where this is officially approved and informed in writing by the Local Authority.

Management of School Debt

The Trust wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents/carers to accumulate debt for school meals which they find difficult to clear. Schools are no different to any other business and meals taken must be paid for in advance.

Therefore, schools can only offer free meals to students who qualify for the free school meals entitlement. All other meals must be paid for.

If a parent/carer genuinely forgets to pay for a school meal in advance, and the student does not have a packed lunch, the Finance Office/ School Secretary will contact the parent/carer on the day to request that the student's ParentPay account is topped up or a packed lunch is brought to the school. If the situation is unavoidable, the school may grant a debt allowance of **one meal** only and will only be granted after the parent/carer has been notified and has agreed. This debt must be paid by the next day and future meals must be paid in advance before any further meals are provided.

If the debt remains outstanding, the debt recovery procedures will be followed as detailed in the Trust's Financial Regulations and Procedures Policy, which can be found on the smart-trust.net website.

The school's safeguarding team may be informed if a student continues to attend school without a packed lunch or funds to be able to purchase a meal.