



ALMOND HILL JUNIOR SCHOOL
GOVERNING BODY

DEBT RECOVERY POLICY

Full Governing Body	February 2021
Committee Meeting	
Date for Review	February 2022

Debt Recovery Policy

This policy relates to payments for school meals, school clubs, music and the year 6 residential trip, the only non-voluntary payments the school presently collects. Where appropriate, this debt collection policy will apply for any other monies the school wishes to collect in the future.

Almond Hill Junior School will take all reasonable measures to vigorously collect debts as part of its management of public funds. A debt will be written off only after all reasonable measures (commensurate with the size and nature of the debt) have been taken to recover it.

Within this policy, the use of the term "parent" shall relate equally to parents, guardians and/or carers. Almond Hill Junior School's debt policy will observe the relevant financial regulations and guidance set out in the school's Financial Regulations and any other legal requirements

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

School Clubs

Children may only attend if the fees have been paid. Schools clubs are paid for in a six week block prior to the club starting. Parents are advised through the school newsletter or leaflets what clubs are available and the cost per session.

Places are secured as long as payment, for the full period, is received in advance with the consent form. If the club is cancelled for an unforeseen reason (eg. staff absence or other matters outside school control) a refund for the lost session(s) will be provided.

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

Year 6 Residential Trip

As per charging policy.

Music

As per charging policy.

School Meals

The responsibility of ensuring school meal payments are made by parents lies with the school. Therefore, a policy is required to ensure school meal debts are kept to a minimum. In writing this policy, the Governors of Almond Hill Junior School wish to implement one that ensures meals are paid for, whilst aiding parents during financial difficulties and ensuring children still receive a meal at lunchtime.

School meals must be paid for in advance of meals being taken. School meals are provided by Herts Catering Ltd and are charged at £2.60 per day (as at 1st April 2019). Meal prices are reviewed annually. Parents will be informed of any price increase to school meals, as soon as possible. All meals must be paid in advance online or to the office if access to a computer is not possible. Meals may be paid for on a daily, weekly, monthly, 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 it will be the parent's responsibility to provide the office with information as to where the error occurs.

Children should know which lunch option they will have each day. If choosing school meals their lunch account must be in credit.

When a child is leaving the school the office will check the balance of the child's account and refund any credit balance and obtain any debt outstanding.

A child may be eligible to receive free school meals, if the parent 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 Immigrations & Asylum Act 1999,
- The Guarantee element of the State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (providing no entitlement to Working Tax Credit) and Working Tax Credit run-on

The school will encourage parents to make an application for free school meals, whether the child takes school meals or not, as the school will receive additional funding known as Pupil Premium.

Since schools will be invoiced for meals taken, it is essential that sufficient funds are credited for these meals into the central account as if there are insufficient funds then the school will have to cover the shortfall from their budget.

Debt Recovery Procedures (School Meals)

Where payment from the parent/carer has not been received the following process should be applied fortnightly.

First 'overdue payment' reminder letter (Appendix 1)

On Monday initial reminder letters will be sent home to all parents by email where there is a debt on their child's account requesting the debt be paid immediately.

Second 'overdue payment' reminder (Appendix 2)

If full payment is not received by Thursday a reminder by email will be sent requesting payment by Friday.

Third 'overdue payment' reminder (Appendix 3)

If by Friday no payment or response is made a final letter will be sent home advising that no further school meals will be provided until payment has been made.

If on the following Monday payment has still not been made and a child is sent into school requesting a school dinner parents will be contacted to request a packed lunch is provided. In the event that this is not received the headteacher will be made aware.

Leavers

Where possible when a pupil is leaving the school parents will be asked to pay any outstanding debt on their dinner money account. If this is not paid after the child has left a phone call is made to request this. If payment is still not made an invoice is sent requesting full payment immediately.

Negotiation of Repayment Terms

Debtors are expected to settle the amount owed by a single payment as soon as possible after receiving the initial 'overdue payment' reminder. However, if people are unable to pay the school a sensitive approach to debt recovery will be carried out, taking the following factors into account:

- Hardship – where paying the debt would cause financial hardship.
- Ill health – where our recovery action might cause further ill health. Page 4 of 10
- Time – where the debt is so large compared to the person's income that it would take an unreasonable length of time to pay it all off.
- Multiple debt – where someone owes more than one debt to the School. In this situation an attempt to agree one repayment plan to include all debts will be established.

If a debtor requests repayment terms these may be negotiated at the discretion of the Headteacher. A record of all such agreements entered into will be retained. In all cases, a letter will be issued to the debtor confirming the agreed terms for repayment. The settlement period should be the shortest that is judged reasonable.

Staff Debts

Staff debts can accumulate from staff school lunches they have taken. School asks that meals are paid for in advance. Where there is a debt on an account statements will be put in staff trays monthly and the debt is due immediately. If the debt is still outstanding at the end of a half term no more school lunches will be provided until the debt is paid in full.

Reporting of Outstanding Debt Levels

The Headteacher will ensure that the level of outstanding debt is regularly monitored. Suitable records will be maintained to detail individual debts and the total value of debt to the school.

Appendix 1

**First overdue reminder letter
Emailed to everyone with a debt on a Monday (fortnightly)**

Dear Parents/Carers,

Your child has been having school meals, and there is a debit on your account. Please log into School Gateway to check your outstanding balance. I am sure this is an oversight on your part and would be grateful if you could send this amount in to school tomorrow. Alternatively, you are able to make an online payment using the Schoolcomms system.

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

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. E Fordham
Head Teacher

Appendix 2

**Second overdue reminder letter
Emailed to everyone with a debt on a Thursday (fortnightly)**

Dear Parents/Carers,

On Monday we sent a letter to inform you that there is an outstanding debt on your child's account for school lunches. We have not yet received payment to clear your account. Please can you pay it either via School Gateway or at the office tomorrow. If you have any problem with meeting this payment please contact me today so we can make arrangements to discuss a payment plan.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. E Fordham
Head Teacher

Appendix 3

Third overdue reminder letter Emailed to everyone with a debt on a Friday (fortnightly)

Dear Parents/Carers,

You will have received two communications from the school regarding your school dinner money debt of £..... We cannot provide any more school lunches until the debt is cleared and request you send a packed lunch to school. In the event that your child does not arrive with a packed lunch school will contact you.

Parents/carers should be aware that the school will refer to the small claims court for outstanding debts that are not addressed.

The school would always wish to work with you if there is a problem in meeting this debt. I would like to meet with you next week to discuss and implement a payment plan.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. E Fordham
Head Teacher

