



ALMOND HILL JUNIOR SCHOOL
GOVERNING BODY

DEBT RECOVERY POLICY

Full Governing Body	July 2022
Date for Review	July 2023

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 may be 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.

Some clubs at school are provided at no cost to families voluntarily by Almond Hill staff.

Year 6 Residential Trip

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 £2.85 per day (as of April 2022). 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.

Children should know which lunch option they will have each day.

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 reminders will be sent to all parents where there is a debt on their child's account requesting the debt be paid immediately.

Second 'overdue payment' reminder (Appendix 2)

This is repeated on a Thursday 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 Herts Catering school meals will be provided until payment has been made (if the debt is greater than £17.15). The headteacher is made aware before this letter is sent.

If 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. If a child is still not provided with a lunch from home, the School Business Manager will make lunch from school provisions. Families will not be allowed to accrue a debt of over £20.

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.
- 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. Staff will not be allowed to accrue a debt higher than £20.

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
Sent to everyone with a debt on a Monday

Dear Parents/Carers,

Though this is probably an oversight we would ask you to pay the amount outstanding.

If you wish to sign up for direct debit, your outstanding balance must be less than £16.00 and you can do so from your SchoolGrid online account. If you do not have an account, please come into the school office with your email address and we will facilitate this.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. E Fordham
Head Teacher

Appendix 2

Second overdue reminder letter Sent to everyone with a debt on a Thursday

Dear Parents/Carers,

Though this is probably an oversight we would ask you to pay the amount outstanding as we cannot extend further credit.

If you wish to sign up for direct debit your outstanding balance must be less than £16.00 and you can do so from your SchoolGrid online account. If you do not have an account, please come into the school office with your email address and we will facilitate this.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. E Fordham

Head Teacher

Appendix 3

Third overdue reminder letter Sent to everyone with a debt on a Friday

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

The school would always wish to work with you if there is a problem in meeting this debt. Please contact me via the office if you like to discuss.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. E Fordham
Head Teacher

