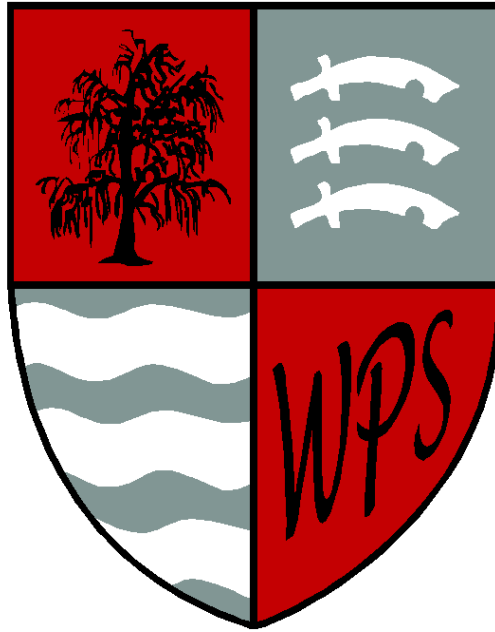


# Willowbrook Primary School



## Debt Policy

## The introduction of a School Debt Policy

### School Meals and Breakfast & After School Clubs

There have been many discussions around whether a child should be refused a meal in school if they have not paid. However, the school meals service is no different than any other business and the meals must be paid for by someone. The School Breakfast & After School Clubs (BASC) offer a service to parents/carers and this should be paid for by those parents/carers/carers who use the service.

Parents/carers can easily relate to the situation that they cannot take their child to McDonalds and expect them to be given food without paying, yet a minority of parents/carers/carers expect free food in school. The Free School Meals system is there for parents/carers/carers who cannot afford school meals, there should be no excuses.

BASC payments should be made in advance and a session should be booked in advance with the payment. This allows the Staff who run the BASC to manage the staff to pupil ratios and to ensure there is sufficient food available. Due to the size of the room used there is a maximum number of spaces and if the sessions are not pre-booked this can cause logistical problems.

The system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach. It may seem a very hard stance in a school where there is a culture of debt tolerance. Although this will be tough to implement it will become easy to maintain once parents/carers realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents/carers qualify for FSM entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for. This also applies to the BASC.

Since our school is invoiced by Pabulum Ltd for meals taken, it is essential that sufficient funds are credited for these meals into the central account, by the cash and cheque deposit process. If there are insufficient funds then the school will have to cover the shortfall from their budget. The Staff employed to run the BASC are paid to do so and if parents/carers do not pay for the sessions they book then the school will have to cover the shortfall from their budget.

### Establishing a debt policy

We make staff and parents/carers aware of the policy by including it in:

- A letter to parents/carers
- The School website

This ensures that all parents/carers get the same message in a consistent way every year.

All parents/carers will be aware of the policy at the beginning of the academic year.

### Debt policy implementation

#### Key Information

1. All parents/carers are provided with a copy of the debt policy at the beginning of the academic year.
2. All school lunches and BASC must be paid for in advance
3. No child should be sent to school without their parent/carer paying online in advance and expect to be given a meal or a space in the BASC.
4. Parents/carers who don't want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch or arrange to take them home for lunch. Parents/carers who cannot pay for the BASC should collect their child at the end of the normal school day, or arrange a meeting with the Headteacher.

#### Level 1

Indicator:	A child orders a lunch but has no money, or turns up at the BASC
Check 1	is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
Check 2	is there a possibility that the payment has not been credited?
Check 3	does this parent/carer normally pay on time, is this just a one off?

**Action 1: send a 'Gentle debt reminder' Appendix 1 (this will be done three times)**

**Level 2**

- Indicator: A child comes to school again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch
- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
- Check 2 is there a possibility that payment has not been credited?
- Check 3 has this parent/carer made contact?

**Action 2: Personal contact**

Someone will phone the parent/carer to ask them to either bring money or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime or to arrange to take their child home at lunchtime. A parent/carer should collect their child at the end of school day and not expect a space in the BASC until any debt is paid

**Level 3**

- Indicator: The parent/carer does not comply with any of these options,
- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
- Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3 has this parent/carer made contact?

**Action 3: send debt policy letter Appendix 2**

The Headteacher will send a final letter.

**Level 4**

- Indicator: The parent/carer consistently does not comply with any of these options,
- Check 1 is this FSM child, are dates correct?
- Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3 has this parent/carer made contact?

**Action 4: send final debt letter Appendix 3**

School to contact LEA to advise, small claims court, social services

## **APPENDIX 1 - Level 1 (Text/email from School Money)**

### **School Money will automatically generate an arrears text as follows:**

Hello, your dinner/club arrears for #DESCRIPTION are now #AMOUNT  
To pay, please go to edsp.co/sm-login with the password #PASSWORD

And an email as follows:

Hello, your dinner/club arrears for #DESCRIPTION are now #AMOUNT.  
To pay please go to edsp.co/sm-login with the password #PASSWORD

## **APPENDIX 2 – Level 3 (Letter from HT)**

As from 1 June 2019 Willowbrook Primary School has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy relating to the school meal service and Breakfast & After School Clubs (BASC).

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/carers. Every parent will agree that this is unacceptable and we request that all parents/carers give this policy their full support.

If parents/carers believe that their children may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals please contact the office for more details. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. We will help you all we can with your application. No parent/carer should expect their child to be given a session in the Breakfast & After School Clubs without payment.

Parents/carers must pay in advance for the school lunch and BASC using any of the methods of payment outlined below:

- Send cash or cheque in a marked envelope
- Using School Money online payment system

Children will not be provided with a school lunch or a space in the BASC unless it is paid for, except those that are entitled to free school meals. If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance up to a maximum of £50. However, this debt must be paid next day and future meals and BASC sessions must be paid in advanced before any meal or space is provided.

If the debt is not cleared, parents/carers must either provide a packed lunch or take the child home for lunch and not send their child to the BASC. In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the school will phone the parent to ask them to come to school with the money. Or to collect their child at the end of school and not send them to the BASC. Otherwise they must provide sandwiches before lunch time or arrange to take their child home for lunch.

If payment of the debt is not received by the next day, the Headteacher reserves the right to refuse further meals or spaces in the BASC and to begin legal proceedings against parents/carers to recover the debt. Social services may also be informed that these parents/carers are not carrying out their responsibility of care by not providing food for their children at lunchtime.

We hope that by implementing this debt policy we are able to help parents/carers manage school dinner money and BASC better and at the same time ensure that all money that is for children's learning is available.

If you have any concerns please do not hesitate in contacting me.

### Appendix 3 – Level 4 (Final letter from HT)

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child XXXXXXXXX(Name) in class XXXX(Name)/ or our records show that you have not paid Breakfast & After School Clubs (BASC) sessions.

As at DATEXXXX your account is showing a debt of **-£XXXX**

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately. Once the debt is cleared please ensure the account is always in credit. Please make a payment via School Money.

Should you need to discuss the possibility of agreeing a repayment plan please contact the office, or arrange a meeting with the Headteacher.

Until the debt is cleared you must either provide a packed lunch or take your child home for lunch and not send your child to the BASC.

Failure to repay the debt will result in the school seeking legal action.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears please contact the school office immediately.