

The Federation of Broughton and West Tytherley Primary Schools



Debt Recovery Policy for Parents/Carers

Name of School:	Broughton and West Tytherley Primary Schools
Name of Responsible Manager/Headteacher:	Mrs Lucy Macey
Date Policy approved and adopted:	March 2023
Date due for review:	March 2025

The Federation of Broughton and West Tytherley Primary Schools

Debt Recovery Policy for Parents/Carers

The Federation of Broughton and West Tytherley Primary Schools will pursue the collection of monies owed to it.

The Federation of Broughton and West Tytherley Primary Schools will ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the families involved will be preserved at all times.

Rationale

This policy has been compiled recognising the difficulties placed on The Executive Headteacher in balancing the social welfare of pupils with the management of the school budget. By introducing a zero-tolerance debt policy, we aim to reduce the risk to parents incurring large debts that they will struggle to pay and minimise the amount of staff time taken in chasing up outstanding payments. By setting out a clear procedure for families, the policy seeks to be fair and proportionate.

We hope that by implementing this policy, we are able to help you, as parents, manage your payments better and, at the same time, ensure that our available budget is used to enhance your children's learning.

Chasing debts is extremely time-consuming for our staff. Time spent checking debts and sending out letters takes our staff away from other duties at school that would benefit all children. We request that all parents and carers work with us to avoid unnecessary time spent chasing debts by making regular payments, in accordance with this policy, for our services.

Why?

- As a publicly funded body we are required to ensure our finances are responsibly managed.
- The Federation of Broughton and West Tytherley Primary Schools will take all reasonable measures to collect debts as part of its management of public funds. Certain costs that are covered by families require us to have a fair and equitable accountability for all families.
- A debt will only be written off after all reasonable measures (commensurate with the size and nature of the debt) have been taken to recover it.
- If debts are incurred, the school budget has to pay for them. This may mean that money that should be spent on children's education is used to pay for debts incurred by families. We hope that you will agree this is unacceptable and we therefore request that families give this policy their full support.

What the school is required to ensure

The school is required to ensure that all monies outstanding are accurately recorded and maintained, including the date by which the monies must be paid. We use 'School Money' for families and staff to make payments.

Documentary evidence needs to be retained of all the steps undertaken by the school to recover debt. This includes recording the dates that correspondence is made via email and/or phone calls, text messages and letters that have been sent to debtors. In all other cases, correspondence with families should indicate the maximum period that the school regards as reasonable before payment is overdue, e.g. payment for items purchased should be sent to school office by, etc.

How payments can be made

Families must pay The Federation of Broughton and West Tytherley Primary Schools for trips, school meals, Early Birds/Breakfast Club and After School Club using School Money. Please ask the school office if you need further assistance.

Early Birds/Breakfast Club and After School Club

Families must pay weekly for sessions taking taken that week (unless previously agreed in advance by the Admin Team) via School Money or child care vouchers. Our Early Birds/Breakfast Club and After School Club have to be self-sufficient and cannot be supported by the main school budget. Payments are therefore crucial to ensure they can remain open. This is a pay-as-you-go service and debts should not be accrued. If families accrue debts, the Executive Headteacher reserves the right to withdraw access to any or all services until the debt is repaid.

School meals

The Federation of Broughton and West Tytherley Primary Schools has adopted a low debt policy relating to the provision of school meals. This means that all money for school meals should be either paid in advance or by the end of the week in which school meals are taken.

The school has a statutory duty to provide free school meals to those who are eligible, but there is no obligation beyond this. If arrears exist, the school can refuse to continue to provide meals. :

A child is eligible for free school meals if their parent or carer receives one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support.
- Income-based Job Seekers' Allowance.
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance.
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.
- The guaranteed element of State Pension Credit.
- Child Tax Credit, provided you are not also entitled to Working Tax Credit, and have an annual gross income, of no more than £16,190 as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (Parents who are made redundant or start working less than

16 hours per week, may find their children are entitled to free meals for a limited period.)

- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods)

To check your child's eligibility for free school meals, use the online checking facility - <https://www.cloudforedu.org.uk/ofsm/hants>

Please be assured that this information will be treated in the strictest confidence.

We will help you all we can with your application. Further information is also available via Hampshire Free School Meals website.

Parents, please note: it is your responsibility to apply for free school meals and to ensure that the Local Authority/School is kept up to date with your circumstances.

Should families incur further school meal debt, the Executive Headteacher reserves the right to request that families provide their child with a packed lunch until the outstanding debt is paid.

We hope that by implementing this debt policy we are able to help families manage school lunch money better and at the same time ensure that all money available for children's learning is spent on precisely that.

Debt recovery

Where payment for services is not received in advance and arrears accumulate longer than one week, the following procedures apply:

Initial reminders

Initial reminders may be informal and made either in person (when a parent comes to collect/drop off a child) or by telephone. Text or email on School Money.

STAGE 1: Informal reminders

1. Balances over £10.00 (ten pounds) – automated weekly alert via School Money reminding parents that there is an outstanding balance on their account.
2. Balances over £20 (twenty pounds) or not cleared within 7 days – Parents will receive an e-mail from the Admin Team reminding them of their balance and requesting arrears are cleared within seven days to avoid further action (Stage 2). Copy of School Debt Recovery Policy attached to e-mail.

STAGE 2: First Formal reminder letter

Where no payment has been received within seven days following the informal reminder contact with the debtor, the first formal letter will be sent by the Admin Team requesting immediate payment (First Formal Letter). Parents are able to set up a payment plan to bring the arrears up to date by contacting our Admin Team - noting payments for on-going services

need also to be kept up to date. A copy of School Debt Recovery Policy will be attached to the e-mail.

Payment Plan – if payments agreed in the Payment Plan (sufficient enough to cover the ongoing weekly costs and pay off the debts for all services) are made on time, the service provision will continue. If regular payments are not made, the place/service will be withdrawn.

- School Meals – Parents will be asked to provide a packed lunch until the debts are paid in full.
- Out of School Care – Parents will be asked to make alternative arrangements for out of school care. Please note that all out of school care will be suspended if one service remains in debt. This includes breakfast club, nursery, and after school provision. Services will be reinstated once the arrears have been paid in full.

If a place at after school club has been withdrawn: parents must be aware that if your child is not collected 30 minutes after school finishes; your child will be provided with a place in wraparound care which will incur a further recoverable charge.

Failure to respond to reminders / settle a debt

If no response is received from the reminders issued, a letter will be sent to the debtor inviting them to a meeting with the Executive Headteacher. At this meeting, it is at the discretion of the Headteacher to allow a payment plan to be set up. Personal circumstances will be taken into account. If the payment plan is not adhered to, or if the debtor does not attend the meeting, a letter will be sent to the debtor advising them that the matter will be referred to the small claims court or a collection agency. Once the matter is referred to the collection agency, no further arrangements can be made with the school and will be handled by the collection agency.

Negotiation of repayment terms

Debtors are expected to settle the amount owed by a single payment as soon as possible after receiving the first 'overdue reminder'. If a debtor asks for 'repayment terms' these may be negotiated at the discretion of the Headteacher. A record of all such agreements will be kept. A letter will be issued to the debtor confirming the agreed terms. The settlement period should be the shortest that is judged reasonable.

The Headteacher will decide whether any debtor who has been granted extended settlement terms will not be offered any further 'credit' and will be required to pay in advance in future. If the debtor does not adhere to the repayment plan then referral to a collection agency will be deemed a last resort action.

Costs of debt recovery

Where the school incurs additional material costs in recovering a debt then the Governors will decide whether to seek to recover such costs from the debtor. This decision and its basis will be recorded. The debtor will be formally advised that they will be required to pay the additional costs incurred by the school in recovering the debt.

Waiving of debt

The waiving of debts is at the discretion of the Headteacher and the Governing Body. A debt may be waived when it is believed the debtor is experiencing serious financial hardship. Please contact the school if you feel this applies to you. A record of the write-off, the reason for it and the approval for it, will be retained for seven years.