

Whitley Lodge First School



Debt Management Policy ParentPay

Reviewed by Governors: November 2025
The next review date: October 2026

Introduction

To this end the Governing Body is responsible for ensuring that procedures are in place for the recovery of any outstanding debt. This policy sets out the procedure for debt recovery within the School and for the write-off of any debt that is deemed to be irrecoverable. This policy applies to all school fee paying services including, school meals, trips and other resources/services sold to parents.

Rationale

This Policy has been compiled recognising the difficulties placed on Headteachers in balancing the social welfare of pupils with the management of the school budget. This policy is fair and just and sets out a clear procedure for families. 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.

School Meals

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.

You do not have to pay for school lunches if you receive any of the following:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit - if you apply on or after 1 April 2018 your household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you get)

Currently infant children (reception, year 1 and year 2 pupils) are entitled to a Universal Free School Meal. This is not the same as a free school meal from the Local Authority.

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

For further information about applying for a free school meal please speak to our School Business Manager via the School Office.

Payment Services

Parents are required to pay for all services provided by the school in advance by making an online payment to their child's account on the ParentPay system. Cash/cheque will only be taken in exceptional circumstances.

On the ParentPay system, separate payment items are listed for every child, for example, school meals, trips, Residential visits etc. ParentPay operates as a pay on booking or for school services such as the Year 4 Residential visit, we offer parents an instalment plan or they can add payments at any time including payment in full.

If you have any difficulty accessing the system, please contact the school office for support and advice.

Debt Recovery

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

STAGE 1: Informal reminders:

Balances over -£5.00 – a weekly text message reminding parents that there is an outstanding balance on their account.

Balances over -£13 or not cleared within 7 days – Parents will receive an e-mail from School Business Team reminding them of their balance and requesting arrears are cleared within 7 days.

Balances over -£13 or not cleared within 14 days – Parents will receive a phone call from the School Business Team. They will be asked to provide a packed lunch for their child until the debts are paid in full.

STAGE 2: Formal written reminder

Where no payment has been received within 7 days following the informal reminders to the debtor, the first formal written reminder letter will be sent via email requesting immediate payment. A copy of School Debt Management Policy will be attached to the email.

STAGE 3: Final written reminder

Where no payment has been received within 7 days of sending the first written reminder letter, the school will issue the final written reminder letter to the debtor. This will be sent via email requesting immediate payment. A copy of School Debt Management Policy will be attached to the email.

At this point an invoice will be raised by WLFS for the full amount due and send via email to the debtor.

At any point of this process, parents are able to set up a payment plan to bring the arrears up-to-date by contacting our School Business Team. Meals will be reinstated once the arrears have been paid in full.

Possible Legal Action

Please note that the Headteacher reserves the right to take legal action to recover debts. Where no payment has been received within 7 days of the final written reminder letter, the matter will be reviewed by the Headteacher who may refer it to the legal team. If the school decides to take legal action against the debtor, they will be informed in writing.

Debt Recovery

Waiving of Debts: 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.

Wavering of Debts procedure: If, after every effort has been made to collect the debt and legal action is considered impractical or has been unsuccessful, individual bad (irrecoverable) debts may be written off in accordance with the following procedures:

- Initial approval must be given by both the Headteacher and School Business Manager
- The write-off must be approved by the Finance Committee and then reported at the next meeting of the Full Governing Body
- The School will retain a Bad Debt Write-Off Summary.

School Support

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

This policy will be available on the school website. Hard copies of the policy will be available on request from the school office.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Governing Body of Whitley Lodge First School.