



The Woodland Academy Trust

Revealing the champion within

“growing in our thinking, learning and feeling together”



Dinner Money Debt Procedure

1. Introduction

This policy has been written to help schools within Woodland Academy Trust adopt a consistent approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school meals. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents/carers clearly understand what is expected of them.

It is a parent’s responsibility to ensure that a child is provided with either a packed lunch or a school meal each day.

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

Woodland Academy Trust has a clear ‘no debt’ policy relating to the school meal service. 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/carer will agree that this is unacceptable, and we request that all parents/carers give this policy their full support.

We hope that through implementing this debt policy we will help parents/carers manage school dinner money better and at the same time ensure that all money that is for children’s learning is used appropriately.

2. Procedures

School meals must be paid for in advance of meals being taken. All payments are made online through Arbor which can be accessed via the Arbor website <https://login.arbor.sc/> or the Arbor App.

Meals may be paid for on a daily, weekly, half termly or termly basis. The minimum payment accepted for meals is £2.30. Children will not be provided with a school meal unless it is paid for, except those that are entitled to free school meals. If a parent/carer genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of up to £4.60 per child. However, this debt must be paid immediately on request, before any further meals are provided.

As soon as a school are notified that a child is leaving, a member of the office staff will run a check on the balance of the child’s account. Any debt outstanding must be paid in full, and any credit balance will be refunded.

3. Free School Meals

If you think your child may be eligible to receive free school meals, please speak to the Front Office. You will then need to supply your Name, NI number and Date of Birth and if eligible you will be informed immediately, and any meal payments will be backdated to the date of eligibility.

Your child may be able to get free school meals if you get 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 or 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)

4. Debt Procedures

In collecting any outstanding debts, a step by step process will be followed. Everyday dinner money debt will be reviewed. If an individual child's account is £4.60 or more in debt the following procedure will apply:

1. Each debt will be reviewed, and an email will be sent, via Arbor, to the parent. (Appendix A). This text requests that the child is provided with a packed lunch until the debt is cleared. The School Office will ensure this is adhered to. If the child arrives at school without a packed lunch the parent/carer will be telephoned asking them to bring this into school immediately.

2. For those debts which received an email and the debt has not been cleared the following day, a phone call will be made by one of the office team to find out when the debt will be cleared. The parent/carer will also be reminded that a packed lunch must be provided from home until the debt is cleared.

3. For those debts that have received an email and a phone call and the debt has still not been cleared, "Debt Letter One" (Appendix B) will be sent via Royal Mail requesting the immediate payment of the outstanding debt.

4. For those debts that have received items 1-3 and the debts have still not been cleared "Debt Letter Two" will be sent via Royal Mail recorded delivery. (Appendix C).

5. The School Business Manager will contact the parent by telephone to arrange an appointment. If this meeting is not kept or a satisfactory situation agreed, the debt will be referred to the Finance and Audit Committee and "Debt Letter Three" will be sent via Royal Mail recorded delivery. (Appendix D).

6. For debts, which received "Debt Letter Three", the Finance and Audit Committee will make a decision on next steps to recover the debt.

If parents do not contact the school regarding the debt and no payment is paid, additional administration costs may be added to the debt. If this is necessary, the Trustees may seek to reclaim these costs and any outstanding debt through the Small Claims Court.

If parents fall into debt more than three times in a term, the school reserves the right to refuse to provide meals for the rest of the term. If any monies are outstanding at the end of the academic year, the school reserve the right to charge an administration fee for time taken to recoup this outstanding debt, as well as claiming the money owed through the Small Claims Court.

5. Financial Support

We acknowledge that on occasion, families have financial difficulties and in these proven circumstances, the school will work hard with the family to agree a solution which is not to the detriment of the child or the family. In the event of a child leaving a member school with an outstanding debt, the Finance and Audit Committee will need to consider what further steps to take. This may include contacting the child's new school and informing them of concerns.

If you are struggling to pay for meals and are not Free School Meal eligible, please speak to the Front Office who will be able to arrange for a meeting with our Community Liaison Officer to discuss personal circumstances and determine if short term school dinner support measures are required for the child(ren).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, our schools will provide meal options for all pupils who are in school. Meals will be available free of charge to:

- All infant pupils (Rec-Year 2)
- Pupils who meet the benefits-related free school meals eligibility criteria.

For all other pupils, the dinner debt procedure applies. Further government support is available for families struggling as a result of coronavirus (COVID-19). If families need urgent help, they can contact their local council to find out what services are available in their area.

Appendix A

Your child(ren)'s account has an outstanding balance of £..... Please can this be settled today. Please can you provide a packed lunch until the debt is cleared. Thank you.

Appendix B

Date :

Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms XXXXX

Re: School Dinner Payments for.....
Dinner Money Rate: Daily £2.30/Weekly £11.50

According to our records has been taking school meals recently. It appears that we have not received sufficient money to cover this cost. We sent you an email communication on and we phoned you on..... but you have not communicated with the school to discuss how and when the debt will be cleared.

The outstanding balance as at..... was £..... I would be grateful if payment could be paid by, via Arbor, including monies for the forthcoming week/half term/term if this is relevant.

It is the policy of Woodland Academy Trust that the School does not pay for dinners on behalf of the children. I would be grateful if you could arrange for prompt payment of this outstanding debt.

Please ensure is provided with a packed lunch until this debt is cleared and school dinners can re-commence. Due to the ever-increasing debts owing for children's dinners, it is imperative that payment for meals is made promptly to the school, in advance of meals being taken.

We acknowledge that on occasion, families have financial difficulties and in these proven circumstances, we will work hard with the family to agree a solution which is not to the detriment of the child or the family.

If you are struggling to pay for meals and are not Free School Meal eligible, please speak to the Front Office who will be able to arrange for a meeting with our Community Liaison Officer to discuss personal circumstances and determine if short term school dinner support measures are required for the child(ren).

Thank you for your assistance. If you wish to discuss this further, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely, XXXXXXXXXXXX
Front Office

Appendix C

Date:

Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms XXXXXXXXX

Re: School Dinners

Dinner Money Rate: Daily £2.30/Weekly £11.50

You will recall that we wrote to you previously regarding the outstanding balance on..... dinner money account. The balance as at is £.....

As you know, it is the policy of Woodland Academy Trust that the School does not pay for dinners on behalf of the children.

As you have failed to clear the outstanding debt as previously requested, via Arbor, I will be phoning you in due course to arrange an appointment to discuss this further.

We acknowledge that on occasion, families have financial difficulties and in these proven circumstances, we will work hard with the family to agree a solution which is not to the detriment of the child or the family.

If you are struggling to pay for meals and are not Free School Meal eligible, please speak to the Front Office who will be able to arrange for a meeting with our Community Liaison Officer to discuss personal circumstances and determine if short term school dinner support measures are required for the child(ren).

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions in the meantime.

Yours sincerely,

XXXXXXXXXXXXXX

School Business Manager

Appendix D

Date:

Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms XXXXXXXX

Re: School Dinners

Dinner Money Rate: Daily £2.30/Weekly £11.50

I am disappointed you were unable to make your appointment on..... to discuss arrangements to recover the outstanding dinner money debt of £

In line with the school's Dinner Money Debt Policy and procedures, a copy of which is available on the school website, I have no option but to refer this outstanding debt to the Finance and Audit Committee who may decide to make a claim in the small claims court.

The Finance and Audit Committee will consider the situation and you will be contacted in due course regarding the recovery of the outstanding debt.

We acknowledge that on occasion, families have financial difficulties and in these proven circumstances, we will work hard with the family to agree a solution which is not to the detriment of the child or the family.

If you are struggling to pay for meals and are not Free School Meal eligible, please speak to the Front Office who will be able to arrange for a meeting with our Community Liaison Officer to discuss personal circumstances and determine if short term school dinner support measures are required for the child(ren).

Yours sincerely

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Head Teacher