

Children's Support Service School Meals Debt Policy

Ratified by the Management Committee – 22 September 2022

Introduction:

This policy has been written to help CSS to adopt a consistent approach to debt. It provides clarity and consistency in managing debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

It is recognised that the cost of school meals needs to be met. However, due to the nature of children who attend CSS and the importance placed on meeting their basic needs, the policy will aim to avoid, within reason, any refusal of a meal.

The Free School Meals system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals. Applying for Free School Meals is straight forward and parents can apply online if they meet the relevant criteria.

Although some schools adopt a 'zero tolerance' approach it is important to remember that CSS works with some of the most vulnerable families in our community and this approach may not be in the best interest of the child. However, CSS cannot carry debts indefinitely so if the amount owed exceeds five meals, no further meals will be provided. All children are offered a snack at break time and this can be substantial where there is need.

Scope:

This document outlines CSS's approach to promoting a debt free environment for CSS and help to prevent families from incurring rolling debts.

Lead Members of Staff:

Whilst all staff have a responsibility to promote a debt free environment, staff with a specific, relevant remit include:

- Office staff handing dinner monies
- Catering Staff
- Engagement Mentors and Personal Tutors

Any member of staff who is concerned about a family getting into debt should speak to the Head of Centre who can take appropriate action.

Approaches to consider:

Level 1

Indicator: A child's account goes into debt

Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?

Check 2 does this parent normally pay on time, is this just a one off?

Action 1: Ask the child to bring in their dinner money when they next attend

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 has this parent made contact?

Action 2: Remind the child they have outstanding dinner money and contact with a parent will be made if they forget to bring in their arrears again

Level 3

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 has this parent made contact?

Action 3: Personal Contact

The office staff will call the parent and remind them of the debt incurred and kindly asks for the monies to be paid at their earliest opportunity

Level 4

Indicator: The parent and child fail to pay the dinner money

Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?

Check 2 has this parent made contact?

Action 4: Send a letter home

School to send a letter home asking parent to pay their arrears

Level 5

Indicator: The parent and child fail to pay the dinner money

Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?

Check 2 has this parent made contact?

Action 5: Personal Tutor and/or Engagement Mentors to become involved

Personal tutor or engagement mentor to speak to family during their regular contact with parents to establish whether the family are in financial difficulty or if they need help applying for free school meals. It may be an opportunity to bring the family in for a meeting as there may be underlying issues that CSS can support with.