

School Debt Policy



The Valley Community School

Reviewed: Autumn 2023

Reviewed by: S.Ali

Attached committee: Resources

Introduction

The staff and Governors at The Valley Community School recognise that the physical and emotional wellbeing of the children in their care is of paramount importance. The school, however, has a legal and moral obligation to apply the resources it receives fairly, to support and for the benefit of all pupils, and is not in a position to subsidise, on a regular basis any one child or group of children.

The school has therefore adopted a debt recovery policy aimed at supporting parents, carers and families in avoiding accumulation of debts in relation to services within its school such as school dinners, breakfast club, nursery fees, school trips and residential trips.

Parents/carers are expected to pay in advance or at the very latest during that week for services provided by the school. All debts owed to a school including those due from parents/carers have an impact on the school budget as the school has to meet the actual costs incurred. This means that any money owed to the school diminishes the resources that can be provided to all children. We hope that parents/carers understand this and that they will make every effort to avoid owing the school money.

School Meals

For children in Key Stage 2 and for those families not receiving Free School Meals, it is the duty of parents/carers, not the school, to provide a midday meal for their child. Parents/carers must either provide a packed lunch for the child or request that the school provide a lunch.

Parents should select which lunch option their child will have at the end of each half term for the following half term. Parents will be informed of cost of meals for each half term and of any price increases in advance.

Parents/carers whose child is not entitled to Free School Meals are expected to pay for these in advance or at the very latest during that week. The Governors of the Valley Community School reserve the right not to provide a school meal in circumstances where payment has not been made.

It is very important that if a parent or a carer believes their child may be eligible for Free School Meals, please visit the Bolton Council website and complete an online form to apply for Free School Meals. This allowance is a statutory right and it is vital that parents/carers use it if they qualify. We will help parents/carers with their application, as required, to find out if they are eligible. The school is only allowed to provide free school meals to pupils where entitlement has been verified.

When a child is leaving it is imperative for the school office to check the balance of the child's account and refund any credit balance and obtain any debt outstanding.

Procedure for Collection of Arrears

It is accepted that on occasion arrears may arise for various reasons. However, arrears cannot be allowed to accumulate.

If a parent/carer genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of 5 meals. However, this accrued debt must be paid within one week and future meals must be paid for in advance before any meal is provided. If the debt is not cleared, parents should provide a packed lunch.

A gentle reminder text message will be sent home for any outstanding arrears.

The parent/carer will be informed in writing where payment hasn't been received during the week.

A final letter to the parent/carer informing them that no meals will be provided for their child/children if payment has not been received by a specified date in accordance with the policy, the date when four weeks of arrears have been accumulated.

No meals to be provided to pupils when arrears exceed four weeks.

Once the final letter deadline has expired the Governing Body will decide whether legal proceedings should begin.

Parents/carers in debt to the school are expected to settle the amount by a single payment as soon as possible after receiving the initial reminder. If they are unable to pay the school may reduce or cancel a debt in certain circumstances. A sensitive approach to debt recovery will be taken and the following factors will be considered:

Hardship	- where paying the debt would cause financial hardship
Ill health	- where our recovery action might cause further ill health
Time	- where the debt is large compared to the person's income and
Cost	- it would take an unreasonable length of time to discharge in full
Multiple debt	- where someone owes more than one debt to the school. In this situation, an attempt to agree one repayment plan to include all debts will be established.

Repayment terms may be negotiated at the discretion of the Headteacher. A record of all such agreements entered will be retained. In all cases a letter will be issued to the parents/carers confirming the agreed terms for repayment. The settlement period should be the shortest that is judged reasonable.

Breakfast Club

Parents will be informed via text at the beginning of each half term, the cost of breakfast club for the month and the half term. Children may only attend if the fees have been paid. Breakfast Club may be paid for on a monthly or half-termly basis. To secure a place, Parents must book and pay for the sessions, if the child does not attend the session, no credit or refund will be given.

Places should be booked and paid for at least a week in advance, but allowing for occasions when this isn't possible, places may be booked last minute, subject to availability. However, this facility will only be offered to those parents who do not owe money.

Nursery Fee Payments

Nursery fee invoices will be issued at the beginning of each half term. Payment should be made that week in advance for the month or half term.

If payment is not received the following procedure will be followed:

A gentle reminder letter / text message will be sent home after one week.

The parent/carer will be informed in writing where two weeks arrears has accumulated and advised to make immediate payment.

If arrears reach 4 weeks - A final letter will be sent to the parent/carer informing them that no sessions will be provided for their child/children until payment is made.

Unpaid fees may result in immediate suspension or termination of care unless reasonable arrangements are made and accepted by both parties. Extra hours are invoiced at the session rate or hourly rate.

Full time and part time fees are based on booked days, not attendance, therefore parents are responsible for fees whether a child attends or not. (This includes sick days and time taken for extended leave)