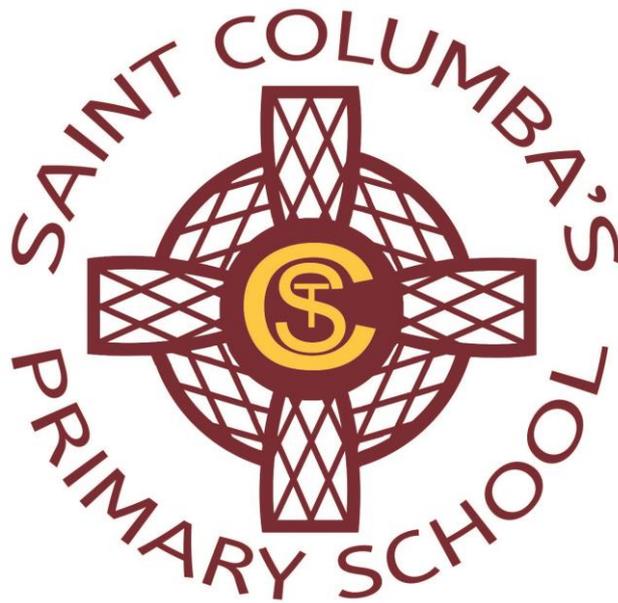


St. Columba's Catholic Primary School



School Meal Provisions and Debt Management Policy

Date policy last reviewed: April 2022

Signed by:

C. Garbutt

Headteacher

Date: April 2022

P. Dinsley

Chair of LGC

Date: April 2022

Contents:

Statement of intent

1. Legal framework
2. Charging for school meals
3. Free school meals (FSM)
4. Management of school meal debts
5. Exceptional circumstances and remissions
6. Monitoring and review

Appendices

- A. Reminder letter
- B. Final warning letter
- C. Outstanding debt payment plan letter

Statement of intent

St. Columba's Catholic Primary is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all pupils, regardless of financial circumstances, and has established the following policy and procedures to ensure that no child is discriminated against.

The Local Governing Committee is responsible for ensuring that school meal provisions are accessible to all pupils and that procedures are in place for the recovery of any outstanding debt.

This policy has been adopted to ensure that there is a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents whose children eat school meals. The responsibility falls on the school to pursue instances of non-payment.

This policy is pertinent to school meal provisions but can also be applied to debt incurred through residential visits or extra-curricular activities. Parents are unable to book places for Breakfast Club and After School Club provision if their accounts are in deficit.

The school budget will be directly affected by any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered, thereby directly affecting all pupils in school. We are confident that every parent will agree that this is unacceptable, and we encourage all parents to give this policy their full support.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- The Education Act 1996
- The Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014
- DfE (2018) 'Charging for school activities'
- DfE (2020) 'Governance handbook'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Complaints Procedures Policy
- Debt Recovery Policy
- Charging and Remissions Policy

2. Charging for school meals

School meals are available to pupils at a cost of £2.25 (Reception to Year 6) or £2.00 (Nursery pupils). There is no cost to those in receipt of FSM entitlement, or pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 who are eligible for Universal Free School Meals. See details of FSM entitlement [below](#).

Payment for school meals must be made before a pupil can order a school lunch. Payments can be made daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly or when the account nears zero. Payment is made using the school's online payment system via the School Gateway app. For further information, please contact the School Office.

3. Free school meals (FSM)

There is a statutory right to FSM for families who meet certain criteria. It is important that all parents who qualify take up their entitlement so that their child can receive a school meal each day.

Parents who receive one or more of the following support payments are entitled to receive FSM (assuming the parent does not receive working tax credit):

- Universal Credit
- 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 they are not also entitled to working tax credit and have an annual gross income of no more than the current threshold)
- Working tax credit run-on – paid for four weeks after they stop qualifying for working tax credit

A pupil is only eligible to receive FSM when a claim for FSM has been made on their behalf to the Pupil Support Team at North Tyneside Council. They will then notify the school of their eligibility.

The responsibility for checking the eligibility of applicants for FSM rests with the Local Authority who carry out these checks via their eligibility checking system.

The school and LA, where appropriate, should record the date on which they receive the initial application for FSM from a parent. Eligibility checks are carried out promptly to ensure that the most accurate and up-to-date information is being utilised.

4. Management of school meal debts

Steps of management of debt

Initial Reminders

Parents will receive an initial reminder. This will be via an informal method of communication such as:

Text message

Phone call

Reminder email

These initial reminders will be sent at regular intervals once a child's School Gateway account is in deficit. This will notify parents of the amount of debt owed. The date and time that these initial reminders are sent will be recorded by school.

Formal Invoices

Where there is an outstanding payment of £22.50 (10 school days of meals at a cost of £2.25 per meal) yet to be received, an invoice will be created outlining the value and reason for the debt.

First formal written reminder – an official, dated letter addressed to the parent / debtor is written up as soon as a child's School Gateway account reaches a debit of -£22.50.

Second formal written reminder – this is sent **one week** after the first formal written reminder, stating the details of all previous reminders (initial and formal) to demonstrate that previous efforts have been made to make the person aware that an outstanding debt is overdue.

Following the second formal written reminder, if payment hasn't been made by a specified date, parents will be informed that they need to provide a packed lunch for their child until the debt has been cleared.

If these reminders are not responded to, another letter is sent to the parent / debtor advising them that the case has been referred to the Local Governing Committee of St. Columba's Catholic Primary School. These parties agree on a timeframe for a repayment or, if necessary, a payment plan for separate instalments. Parents will need to continue to provide a packed lunch for their child as no school meals can be ordered until the payment plan has been cleared.

The school expects that the debt should be repaid as soon as possible, particularly after repeated reminders; however, this can be negotiated at the discretion of the Local Governing Committee.

If there is a case where the parent / debtor is deemed to be refusing to pay without sufficient reason, the school may consider involving the Bishop Bewick Catholic Education Trust's legal services to resolve the issue and recuperate owed funds.

5. Exceptional circumstances and remissions

Our school Governors and Staff are always available to help and support where we are able. Please arrange an appointment to talk to us if parents have concerns, queries or need advice and support.

We appreciate that family circumstances can differ and that childcare arrangements are unique and personal to each family. In the case where a child's contact with their parents is shared between different households, initial reminders and formal correspondence will be sent to the parent we have listed as **priority contact one** on our school database. We would therefore appreciate the support of both parents to work with the school to clear any debt. Individual circumstances will be considered on a case by case basis. We would request that, if parents are sharing responsibility for the payment of school meals, and both parties would like to receive correspondence from school, please inform the School Office.

The school ensures that parents of pupils are aware of the help the school can extend to those in financial difficulty. Parents who may be eligible for support are those in receipt of any of the benefits outlined in [section 3](#) of this policy.

In a case where there is, or it is suspected that there is, an overdue debt from a family who may qualify for support, details of the different types of bursaries available should be sent to the parent / debtor in question.

We understand that financial difficulties can place great strain on people. If you are currently experiencing financial difficulties and would like to speak to somebody for advice, you may find the following organisations helpful:

- Money Advice Service, available on 0800 138 7777 or at: <https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en>
- Citizens Advice, available on 0800 144 8848 or at: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/contact-us/contact-us/>
- National Debtline, available on 0808 808 4000 or at: <https://www.nationaldebtline.org/contact-us/>

The Local Governing Committee is not guaranteed, but may decide, to waive or reduce the outstanding debt in these circumstances.

6. Monitoring and review

This policy is reviewed annually by the Local Governing Committee and Headteacher. The next scheduled review date for this policy is 1st April 2023.

Appendix A: Reminder letter



St. Columba's Catholic Primary School

Station Road, Wallsend, Tyne and Wear. NE28 8EN

Telephone: 0191 262 3098

www.stcolumbasprimary.co.uk

Email Address: scpschool@stcolumbasprimary.co.uk

Headteacher: Mrs. C. Garbutt



Re: Reminder letter of payment for school meals

Dear **name of parent**,

According to our records, it appears that there is an outstanding payment for school meals for your child from **date**. The amount due for payment is **£amount**. We would be grateful if you would kindly clear this outstanding balance as soon as possible. The last payment shown on our system was made on **date**. Please pay via the School Gateway app.

If the debt is not paid, the issue will be escalated to the Local Governing Committee.

If you have any queries or difficulties with the payment of this amount, please let us know immediately and we will aim to help. Feel free to contact Mrs Wallace at the School Office via the contact details above.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Wallace

School Business Manager

Appendix B: Final warning letter



St. Columba's Catholic Primary School

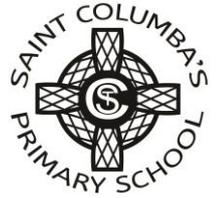
Station Road, Wallsend, Tyne and Wear. NE28 8EN

Telephone: 0191 262 3098

www.stcolumbasprimary.co.uk

Email Address: scpschool@stcolumbasprimary.co.uk

Headteacher: Mrs. C. Garbutt



Re: Final warning letter for payment of school meals debt

Dear **name of parent**,

We have written to you previously regarding your child's outstanding school meal fees and, according to our records, we still have not received any payment. The last payment shown on our system was made on **date**.

The previous reminders that have been sent are as follows:

- Initial reminder 1: **date and time**
- Initial reminder 2: **date and time**
- First formal written reminder: **date and time**

The amount due for payment is £**amount** and, as per our School Meals Provisions and Debt Management Policy, unless we receive payment by **date**, your child will need to bring a packed lunch until the debt has been paid, via the School Gateway app.

If the debt is not paid within this time, the issue will be escalated to the Local Governing Committee.

If you have any queries or difficulties with the payment of this amount, please let us know and we will aim to help and support where possible.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Mrs C Garbutt

Headteacher

Appendix C: Outstanding debt payment plan letter



St. Columba's Catholic Primary School

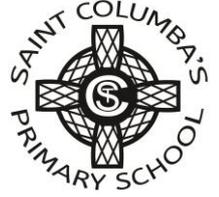
Station Road, Wallsend, Tyne and Wear. NE28 8EN

Telephone: 0191 262 3098

www.stcolumbasprimary.co.uk

Email Address: scpschool@stcolumbasprimary.co.uk

Headteacher: Mrs. C. Garbutt



RE: Outstanding debt payment plan

Dear **name of parent**,

I am writing to you following our discussion with the Local Governing Committee regarding your outstanding debts to the school.

[Outline here the details of the meeting held with the parent and Local Governing Committee to discuss the payment schedule. Note the date and time of the meeting, outline the conclusions that came from the meeting, and reflect the agreed payment schedule using the table below.]

As discussed on **date** and **time**, you currently owe the school £**amount** – a full breakdown of which can be found in the invoice issued to you on **date**, which is attached.

We appreciate that money pressures can be stressful and, as agreed in our previous communication with the Local Governing Committee, we have outlined the agreed payment plan below.

Payment plan

Outstanding debt	
Schedule of payments	
Total number of payments agreed	
Instalment amount	
First payment date	
Second payment date	
Third payment date	

Fourth payment date	
Final payment date	
Payment method	

Please note, any missed or late payments within this payment schedule will result in a final notice of payment. Once you have received the final notice, you will have seven days to pay the outstanding fee. If, after this time, no payment has been received, we may initiate formal legal proceedings.

If your financial situation changes and you are able to pay the remaining debts sooner than the schedule, you can contact the Headteacher or School Business Manager to discuss whether payments will be accepted.

We understand that financial difficulties can place great strain on people. If you are currently experiencing financial difficulties and would like to speak to somebody for advice, you may find the following organisations helpful:

- Money Advice Service, available on 0800 138 7777 or at:
<https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en>
- Citizens Advice, available on 0800 144 8848 or at:
<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/contact-us/contact-us/>
- National Debtline, available on 0808 808 4000 or at:
<https://www.nationaldebtline.org/contact-us/>

If you have any additional questions regarding your debt or payment plan with the school, you can contact Mrs Wallace on scpschool@stcolumbasprimary.co.uk and we can discuss your options to avoid any issues with repayment.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation with the payment plan.

Best wishes,

Mr P Dinsley

Chair of Local Governing Committee