



# Nursery Hill Primary

## Dinner Money and Debt Recovery Policy

**Status of policy – Statutory/Non-Statutory**

**DATE REVIEWED:** March 2025

**DATE APPROVED:** March 2026

**By**

**NEXT REVIEW DATE:** March 2026

**Signed: Phil Johnson Vice Chair of Governors**

**Signed: Sarah Jeans Headteacher**

## **Introduction**

The staff and Governors at Nursery Hill Primary 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.

Parents/carers are expected to pay in advance for services provided by the school and this can be paid using the online payment system: School Money. 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.

**It is a parental responsibility to ensure that a child is provided with a meal at school either a packed lunch or a school meal.**

Parents are responsible for ensuring school meals are paid for and the school has a responsibility to ensure that money is not owing for school meals.

In writing this policy, the Governors of Nursery Hill Primary School 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.

## **Procedures**

School meals must be paid for in advance of meals being taken through the school's online payment system, currently School Money.

Meals may be paid for on a weekly, half termly, termly or regular top up basis.

As soon as school are notified that a child is leaving, it is imperative for the school office to check the balance of the child's account. Any debt outstanding must be paid in full, and any credit balance will be refunded.

## **Qualifying for free school meals**

**Your child may be eligible to receive free school meals, to find out more please contact the following service for further advice and guidance:**

Telephone: (01926) 359189,

Email: [freemeals@warwickshire.gov.uk](mailto:freemeals@warwickshire.gov.uk)

Warwickshire County Council have an online eligibility checker at:

[www.warwickshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals)

Families who receive the following are eligible for Free School Meals:

- Income support
- Income-based job seeker's allowance (JSA)
- Income-related employment and support allowance (ESA)
- Guarantee element of state pension credit
- Universal credit
- Both income-cased and contribution-based JSA/ESA if you receive the same amount for both. You should also qualify if you receive both but the Income-based amount is greater, but not if the contribution-based amount is greater

- Families who are awarded Child Tax Credit and have an annual income, as assessed by HMRC, not in excess of £16,190 are also eligible to claim free school meals providing there is no entitlement to Working Tax Credit (unless in respect of a 4-week 'run-on').

The online checking system only confirms or denies your eligibility to claim free school meals: it does not give Warwickshire County Council any other information.

If you are currently in receipt of either Universal Credit or the 4-week run on of Working Tax Credit the system will not automatically be able to determine your eligibility, therefore you will need to send proof that you are in receipt of these benefits to the Free School Meals office once you have completed and saved your application.

When your eligibility has been confirmed and your application processed, you will be sent an email confirming eligibility. The school will also receive notification of your child's application. We will help parents/carers with their application, as required, to find out if they are eligible.

The online checking system will continuously check your eligibility status and inform you and the school of any changes.

In general payment for all goods and services supplied by the School should be collected in advance or 'at the point of sale'.

The School will take all reasonable measures to vigorously collect debts as part of its management of public funds. The procedures to secure the collection of all debts are outlined below and should be followed by all school staff.

### **Parents**

Parents are expected to notify staff or the Headteacher of any concerns or queries regarding the Debt Recovery policy.

### **Acceptable 'credit period'**

The Governing Body have determined the following length of time deemed as an acceptable 'credit settlement period' before the debt recovery procedures are applied.

- ☐ NHP Early Birds and Night Owls Wrap Around Club - fourteen (14) days
- ☐ NHP Nursery – fourteen (14) days

### **Debt procedures**

The school uses an online payment system, currently School Money, to collect payment for school meals, visits, clubs and Wrap Around Care and also for parents to book meals in advance.

When parents log in they will be able to see the funds available and will be able to top up their child's account so that no debt occurs.

It is the school's intention to ensure that meals are paid for in a timely fashion thus avoiding the creation of debt.

If, however debts occur, in collecting any outstanding debts, a step-by-step process will be followed.

The time lapse between the steps will normally be 5 school days. However, this may vary depending on factors such as the time period within a term.

**Step 1 -**

Accounts outstanding reviewed weekly. Emails and texts are sent via School Money requesting for all debts to be cleared. (Appendix 1).

Until debts are cleared, no lunches will be provided and parents will be contacted to bring a pack lunch in to school for their child if they arrive without one.

Funds can be added at this stage to enable the child to have a hot dinner.

**Step 2 -**

If debts are not cleared within one week, a second letter will be sent via eSchools (Appendix 2), requesting for parents/carers to make an appointment with the School Office Manager to discuss the outstanding debt and possible payment plans.

**Step 3 -**

If no contact has been made with the School Office Manager and/or accounts haven't been settled, the school will refer the outstanding debt to the governors, who will decide on the course of action.

Additional administration costs may be incurred and these will be added to the debt.

The governors might seek to reclaim the debt through the Small Claims Court.

If parents fall in to debt more than three times in one term, the school reserves the right to refuse meals for the rest of the term.

## The Recovery Timetable

Action	Total Days	Elapsed Days
Invoice	1	1
First Reminder	15	14
Telephone Call	23	7
Final reminder	37	14
Within 10 days a decision should be made regarding further activity, which may include legal action.		

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.

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. However, families have a responsibility to engage with the school to discuss the issue and seek a resolution.

In the event of a child leaving Nursery Hill Primary School with an outstanding debt, the Governing Body will need to consider what further steps to take which may include contacting the child's new school and informing them of concerns.

### **Debt Recovery**

The Governors of Nursery Hill Primary School will take all reasonable measures to vigorously collect debt as part of its management of public funds. The School's debt recovery policy will observe the relevant financial regulations and any other legal requirements.

### **Acceptable 'Credit Period'**

The Governors of Nursery Hill Primary School has determined that one half term is an acceptable 'credit settlement period' before debt recovery procedures are applied.

### **Reporting of Outstanding Debt Levels**

The Office Manager will ensure that the level of outstanding debt is known / can be determined at any time.

The Resources Committee will review the level of outstanding debts every term to determine whether this level is acceptable and whether action to recover debts is effective.

### **Bad Debts**

If all reasonable steps have been taken to recover the debt and there is no reasonable prospect for cost effective recovery, the limits below can be written off:

Below £20 requires the approval of the Office Manager.

£21 to £80 requires written approval of the Headteacher using their knowledge of circumstances and previous record of payment.

£81 to £500 the Resources Committee can write off a maximum of £500.

The LA will support schools seeking the recovery of any debt. If recovery proves impossible governing bodies are authorised to write off debts up to £500. Debts in excess of this must be referred to the LA and dealt with in line with the County Council's Financial Standing Orders.

At the discretion of the Headteacher the debtor may be advised that they will be required to pay in advance for all future supplies or the supply will no longer be available to them. This decision and its basis will be recorded.

A record of the write-off, the reason for it, and the approval for it, will be retained for 7 years.



## Appendix 1

Dear Parent/Carer

**Pupil:**

**Class**

I am writing to remind you that according to our records, you have arrears on your child's School Money account. In order for your child to continue to receive school lunches/ attend Wrap Around Care, it is important to keep your account in credit.

Our records show that for Child/Class your outstanding balance is \_.

**Please arrange for this to be paid immediately** by using School Money, our secure online payment system. You can use the login previously provided. Please visit <https://login.eduspot.co.uk/public/portal/parent/>

Your username and password are:

**User Name Password**

You can check your account balance at any time by logging into your School Money account. Please provide your child with a packed lunch until the outstanding debt is cleared.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or if you have difficulty making payment please contact the school office to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely

School Office Manager

## Appendix B



Date:

Dear Parent/Carer,

### **Re: School Dinners**

You will recall that I wrote to you a few days ago regarding the outstanding balance on \_\_\_ School Money account.

The balance as at \_\_\_\_\_ is £\_\_\_\_\_.

As you know, it is the policy of Warwickshire County Council that the School does not pay for dinners on behalf of the children.

I am disappointed that you have not paid the monies owing via School Money as requested in my previous letter, and would request that you telephone the office to make an appointment to see me to discuss this further.

Thank you for your assistance. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Tweddle  
School Office Manager