



Debt Recovery Policy

Overview

There is increasing concern that the school's budget is being used to cover payments that should be being met by parents. This means that finance that should be being used to provide an education for children is being diverted in to inappropriate areas. This policy relates to payments that should be made by parents to school for the following activities:

- 1) School lunches
- 2) After School Clubs
- 3) School trips which are not part of the curriculum

How the debt is accrued

After School Clubs and Non-Curriculum trips

The school differentiates between school trips that are a part of the curriculum which are funded by voluntary contributions and trips (and elements of trips) that are outside of the curriculum which can be funded by charging¹. Where charges are not paid by the parent in advance of the trip the school will not usually be able to fund participation in the trip. This also applies to after-school clubs where non-payment by the parents will mean that the child cannot participate in the club.

In exceptional circumstances where the school does fund participation the amount that the school pays will be treated as a debt under this policy.

School Lunches

School meals are provided by ISS Facilities Services at a cost of £2.15 per meal. Parents place the order either in person or online and have the option of paying at a later date. Increasingly, payments are not being made and the school is required to cover the debt by virtue of the agreement between the school, West Berkshire District Council and ISS Facilities. This is having a detrimental effect on the school budget, which is required for the teaching, learning and development of the children.

Initial Steps

When a parent has accrued a debt of £10, the school will send an initial letter setting out the amount that is owed and asking for payment within 7 days. The letter will also advise that the child's account will be blocked and no further meals will be able to be taken until payment is received.

If payment is not received within 7 days, a second letter will be sent reminding those who have outstanding debts. This letter will inform parents that in the event that no payment is made, the school may be forced to refer the matter to West Berkshire Council (WBC) Legal Services.

Referral to Legal Services

In the event that parents do not respond to a letter from the school, or if they do not make payments in line with any agreed schedule it may be necessary for the school to make a referral to West Berkshire Council Legal Services.

¹ For more information please see Bradfield Primary School Charging and Remissions Policy

The school will ask the Council to send a final demand letter. This letter will set out the amount of debt, the previous communication that the school has sent and the final deadline by which payment should be received. It will also outline the potential for court action and the consequences that non-payment might have.

Court Action

Persistent non-payment leaves us with the unfortunate need to take formal action to reclaim the debt. With the assistance of West Berkshire Council Legal Services we may issue proceedings in the County Court (small claims court) to recover the money. The result of this could be a County Court Judgment being placed against the debtor's name and address. The school can also take steps to recover the costs of chasing the debt through the court. We hope that this action will not be necessary.

Communication with parents

Where, at any stage, parents respond to the letters sent out in relation to the debt, the school will co-operate with parents in attempts to agree a schedule of payments that will enable the debt to be repaid. If parents are having financial difficulties, please speak to the Headteacher or School Business Manager at school. The school is happy to help with alternative arrangements and encourages the claiming of Free School Meals Eligibility.

Summary of Procedure

1. Debt of over £10 is accrued by parent
2. School writes to parent informing them of the debt, including an invoice, and advising that the child's account has been blocked and no further meals can be taken until payment is received, 7 days will be allowed for payment to be made
3. If there is no response, a further letter is sent outlining referral to West Berkshire Council Legal Services if no payment is made
4. If there is still no response, the matter should be referred to WBC Legal Services who will send a final warning letter
5. If the parents still do not respond, the school and WBC Legal Services will consider issuing proceedings through the County Court.

Relationship to other policies

Nothing in this policy alters or affects the position in relation to any voluntary contributions that are requested by the school in relation to trips in support of the curriculum. Pupils will not be excluded from trips if these voluntary contributions are not paid, however, if insufficient contributions are received trips may be cancelled.

This policy does not place any other requirement on the parent or change any responsibility of the school to provide a broad and balanced education for the children.