

St Francis Catholic Primary School



Debt Recovery Policy and Procedures

Jesus said 'Love one another as I have loved you'

St Francis School is a loving community, respecting every child and adult and caring for God's World, as we help each other to do our best and grow together in Christ.

This school is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people and expects all staff and volunteers to share in this commitment.

Introduction

This policy relates to contributions for School Dinners, Breakfast Club, School Clubs and Lettings, the only non-voluntary payments the school presently collects. Where appropriate, this debt collection model will be used for any other monies the school wishes to collect in the future.

Within this policy, the use of the term “parent” shall relate equally to parents, guardians and/or carers.

Essex County Council cannot and will not sustain any debts outstanding. Therefore, a policy is required to ensure school debts are kept to a minimum. St Francis Catholic Primary School will take all reasonable measures to vigorously collect debts as part of its management of public funds. A debt will be written off only after all reasonable measures (commensurate with the size and nature of the debt) have been taken to recover it.

St Francis Catholic Primary School’s debt recovery policy will observe the relevant financial regulations and guidance set out in the school’s Financial Regulations and any other legal requirements.

Payment Collection Procedures

School Dinners

School meals must be paid for in advance of meals being taken. All meals for the period being paid for must be paid on a Monday morning and handed into the office.

Meals may be paid for on a weekly, half termly or termly basis and parents are advised through the school newsletter towards the end of each term / half term what the cost of school meals will be for the next period. If parents choose to pay either half termly or termly and a debt arises at the end of that period it will be the parent’s responsibility to provide the office with information as to where the error occurs.

All meals must be booked at the beginning of the period paid for; meals may no longer be booked or paid for during the week. Therefore, all money must come into school for any meals required from Monday to Friday.

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.

If a pupil has a school meal every day it will be assumed that on “themed” days they will take that meal. Parents will need to advise the school office if that is not the case.

If a pupil does not have meals every day the parents will need to return the appropriate form to confirm that lunch is required.

When adults are invited to lunch meals must be booked and either pre-paid or paid for in cash by 10 o'clock on the date given. No meals will be provided after this time.

Breakfast Club

Breakfast Club may be paid for on a weekly, half termly or termly basis and parents are advised through the school newsletter towards the end of each term / half term the cost of the sessions for the next period. If parents choose to pay either half termly or termly and a debt arises at the end of that period it will be the parent's responsibility to provide the office with information as to where the error occurs.

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 whose account is in credit.

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.

School Clubs (Lunchtime and After School)

School Clubs are paid on either a half termly or termly basis and the cost of each club is provided to parents through letters or leaflets sent out at the end of each half term / term. Places are secured as long as payment, for the full period, is received in advance with the consent form. If the club is cancelled for an unforeseen reason (e.g. staff absence or other matters outside school control) a refund for the lost session (s) will be provided.

School Lettings

Lettings are agreed in advance with the agreement of the Headteacher and invoices are raised either a) within 1 week of the date of hire or b) at the end of every term (for long term lets e.g. Choral Society). Payment terms are 30 days.

Debt Recovery Procedures

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 level of debt and the time period within a term. Next steps will be implemented if the debt has not been repaid or any contact made with the School.

School Dinners

- WEEK 1: Every Friday debts will be reviewed and anyone with a debt of £10 (the equivalent of one week's meals) will be sent an "initial reminder SM" text (Appendix A).
- WEEK 2: For those debts which received an "initial reminder" text the previous week that have not yet been cleared a "debt letter one SM" will be sent via the child. This letter requests that the child is provided with a packed lunch until the debt is cleared. The School Office will ensure this is adhered to – if the child arrives at School without a packed lunch the parent / carer will be telephoned asking them to bring this into School immediately. (Appendix B)
- WEEK 3: For those debts which received "debt letter one SM" the previous week that have still not been cleared, a "debt letter two SM" will be sent via Royal Mail requesting that the parent / carer makes an appointment with the Head to discuss the outstanding debt. (Appendix C)
- WEEK 4: For those debts which received "debt letter two SM" the previous week which are still not cleared, the school will contact the parent by telephone to arrange an appointment. If this meeting is not kept or a satisfactory situation agreed, the debt will be referred to the Governing Body and "debt letter three SM" will be sent via Royal Mail recorded delivery. (Appendix D)
- WEEK 5: For those debts which received "debt letter three SM" the previous week, for which no settlement has been made, the School Governors will be advised. They will need to make a decision on how to deal with this debt and may consider a claim in the Small Claims Court.

Breakfast Club

- WEEK 1: Each Friday debts will be reviewed and anyone with a debt of £18.75 (the equivalent of a week's Breakfast Club sessions) will be sent an "initial reminder BC" text. (Appendix E).
- WEEK 2: For those debts which received an "initial reminder BC" text the previous week that have not yet been cleared a "debt letter one BC" will be sent via the child. This letter will state the child will be unable to attend Breakfast Club until the debt is cleared. The School Office will ensure this is adhered to by providing the Breakfast Club staff with details of the child and if the child arrives at School without payment, they will be refused entry. (Appendix F)
- WEEK 3: For those debts which received "debt letter one BC" the previous week that have still not been cleared, a "debt letter two BC" will be sent via

Royal Mail requesting that the parent / carer makes an appointment with the Headteacher to discuss the outstanding debt. The child will continue to be excluded from Breakfast Club. (Appendix G)

- WEEK 4: For those debts which received “debt letter two BC ” the previous week which are still not cleared, the school will contact the parent by telephone to arrange an appointment. If this meeting is not kept or a satisfactory situation agreed, the debt will be referred to the Governing Body and “debt letter three BC” will be sent via Royal Mail recorded delivery. (Appendix H) The child will continue to be excluded from Breakfast Club and the Governing Body retain the right to refuse them a place in the future.
- WEEK 5: For debts which received “debt letter three BC” the previous week, which have yet to be settled, the School Governors will be advised. They will need to make a decision on how to deal with this debt and may consider a claim in the Small Claims Court.

School Clubs

Children will not be allowed to start to participate in any School Clubs (where there is a cost associated) unless payment has been received in advance. The office staff generate a record of all consent forms as they are received, which in turn is used as a club register. Payments are reconciled against the register.

- 1 WEEK Fees outstanding a week prior to the club starting are reviewed and any not received will be sent an “initial reminder” text or phone call. (Appendix I)
- 2 DAYS For fees outstanding two days before the start of the club, which received an “initial reminder” text / call previously that have not yet been settled, the school will contact the parent by telephone to advise that the child will be unable to attend the School Club unless the fees are received in full by the morning of the club start date. (Appendix J)

A record of the conversation will be annotated on the consent form of the child.

School Lettings

Following the initial 28 day payment term, outstanding debts will be processed as follows:

- Day 28 The Hirer will be sent an “outstanding debt letter one L” via Royal Mail. (Appendix K). At this point all future hire dates will be suspended pending payment in full.
- DAY 42: For those debts which received an “outstanding debt letter one L” two weeks previously that have not yet been cleared, a “debt letter two L” will

be sent via Royal Mail. (Appendix L) advising the hirer that non-payment could result in referral to the school's legal services provider and to request an appointment with the Head to discuss the outstanding debt.

DAY 59: For those debts which received "debt letter two L" two weeks previously that have still not cleared, a "debt letter three L" will be sent via Royal Mail stating the debt will be referred to the Governing Body who will deal directly with the school's legal provider for the recovery of the debt.

Families in Financial Difficulty

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.

Mid Year / End of Year transfer.

In the event of a child leaving St Francis Primary School with an outstanding debt, the Governing Body will need to consider whether to write off this debt or pursue payment by other means including making a claim in the Small Claims Court.

Negotiation of repayment terms

Debtors are expected to settle the amount owed by a single payment as soon as possible after receiving the first 'initial reminder'.

If a debtor asks for 'repayment terms' these may be negotiated at the discretion of the Finance Committee. A record of all such agreements will be kept. A letter will be issued to the debtor confirming the agreed terms (unless this is not judged necessary). The settlement period should be the shortest that is judged reasonable.

The Finance Committee will decide whether any debtor who has been granted extended settlement terms will not be offered any further 'credit' and will be required to pay in advance in future.

Costs of debt recovery

Where the school incurs material additional costs in recovering a debt then the Finance Committee will decide whether to seek such costs from the debtor. This decision and its basis will be recorded.

The debtor will be formally advised that they will be required to pay the additional costs incurred by the school in recovering the debt.

Reporting of outstanding debt levels

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

The Finance Committee will review the level of outstanding debt every quarter (or regularly if required) to determine whether this level is acceptable and whether action to recover debts is effective.

Bad debts

If, having taken legal advice, it is determined that the debt is not recoverable it will need to be 'written off' as set out in Section 3.4 of the school's Financial Regulations.

Write-off of any debt requires the written approval of the Headteacher up to a maximum of £5000, and up to £10000 by the Finance Committee. A record of the write-off, the reason for it, and the approval for it, will be retained for 7 years.

Signed (Chair of Governors):	Name:	Date:
Signed (Head):	Name: Maggie Jones	Date: 18 th March 2014
Next Review: March 2015		

Appendix A

Initial Reminder SM - Text message

'CHILD NAME' dinner money is now £10 in arrears. Please send payment asap incl sufficient credit for next week. Thank you.

The office staff will check the text system to ensure the text has been delivered.

Appendix B

Debt Letter One SM

Date :

Dear Parent/Carer

Re: School Meals

I am writing to advise you that there is an outstanding balance of £..... on dinner money account. It is the policy of Essex County Council that the School does not pay for dinners on behalf of the children. As a result, I need to advise you that the school will be unable to provide a dinner for until this debt is cleared.

Please send in payment, including monies for the forthcoming week / half term / term if this relevant, as soon as possible. Please make any cheques payable to St Francis Catholic Primary School.

If you are experiencing financial difficulty a weekly payment plan to pay the debt would be acceptable, i.e. £1 per week. Please contact the School Business Manager for more information and to put a plan in place.

Please ensure..... is provided with a packed lunch until this debt is cleared and school dinners can re-commence.

Thank you for your assistance. If you wish to discuss this further, then please do not hesitate to contact me. I enclose a copy of the school's Debt Recovery Policy and procedures for your information.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs M. Jones
Headteacher

Enc. Debt Recovery Policy and procedures

Appendix C

Debt Letter Two SM

Date:

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: School Meals

I am writing in reference to the outstanding balance on dinner money account to the value of £..... It is the policy of Essex County Council that the School does not pay for dinners on behalf of the children. I've been advised that you have not yet contacted the School Business Manager to discuss a weekly payment plan as suggested 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

Mrs M. Jones
Headteacher

Appendix D

Debt Letter Three SM

Date:

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: School Meals

I'm disappointed you've been unable to contact me, as requested in my previous letter, to make arrangements to recover the outstanding debt of In line with the school's Debt Recovery Policy and procedures, a copy of which was sent with the last letter, I have no option but to refer this outstanding debt to the school Governors.

The School Governors will consider the situation and will contact you in due course over the action they will take, which could include making a claim in the small claims court.

Yours sincerely

Mrs M. Jones
Headteacher

Appendix E

Initial Reminder BC - Text message

'CHILD NAME' breakfast club account is now over £10 in arrears. Please send payment asap incl sufficient credit for next week. Thank you.

The office staff will check the text system to ensure the text has been delivered.

Appendix F

Debt Letter One BC

Date :

Dear Parent/Carer

Re: Breakfast Club

I am writing to advise you that there is an outstanding balance of £..... on breakfast club account. It is the policy of Essex County Council that the School does not pay for breakfast club sessions on behalf of the children. As a result, I need to advise you that the school will be unable to provide a place for at breakfast club until this debt is cleared.

Please send in payment, including monies for the forthcoming week / half term / term if this relevant, as soon as possible. Please make any cheques payable to St Francis Catholic Primary School.

If you are experiencing financial difficulty a weekly payment plan to pay the debt would be acceptable, i.e. £2 per week. Please contact the School Business Manager for more information and to put a plan in place.

Please note will be refused entry to breakfast club lunch until this debt is cleared.

Thank you for your assistance. If you wish to discuss this further, then please do not hesitate to contact me. I enclose a copy of the school's Debt Recovery Policy and procedures for your information.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs M. Jones
Headteacher

Enc: Debt Recovery Policy and procedures

Appendix G

Debt Letter Two BC

Date:

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: Breakfast Club

I am writing in reference to the outstanding balance on breakfast club account to the value of £..... It is the policy of Essex County Council that the School does not pay for breakfast club places on behalf of the children. I've been advised that you have not yet contacted the School Business Manager to discuss a weekly payment plan as suggested 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

Mrs M. Jones
Headteacher

Appendix H

Debt Letter Three BC

Date:

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: Breakfast Club

I'm disappointed you've been unable to contact me, as requested in my previous letter, to make arrangements to recover the outstanding debt of In line with the school's Debt Recovery Policy and procedures, a copy of which was sent with the last letter, I have no option but to refer this outstanding debt to the school Governors.

The School Governors will consider the situation and will contact you in due course over the action they will take, which could include making a claim in the small claims court.

Yours sincerely

Mrs M. Jones
Headteacher

Appendix I

Initial Reminder SC – Text Message

If you would like 'CHILD NAME' to participate in 'SCHOOL CLUB' next term, payment of £ X is now due. Please send asap. Thank you

Appendix J

Telephone Reminder SC

Office staff to ask:

'We have a consent form for your child stating they would like to participate in 'SCHOOL CLUB' next term. Do you still want a place for your child, as payment has not been received? Payment must be made in advance or your child will not be able to attend the club'

A record of the response is to be annotated on the child's consent form.

Appendix K

Debt Letter One L

Date :

Dear Hirer

Re: Invoice _____

According to our records we have not yet received payment in settlement of the aforementioned invoice that was sent on

This invoice is now overdue all future hire dates will be suspended and access to the site will be refused, pending payment in full. Please make any cheques payable to St Francis Catholic Primary School.

If you are experiencing financial difficulty a weekly payment plan to pay the debt would be acceptable. Please contact the School Business Manager for more information and to put a plan in place.

Thank you for your assistance. If you wish to discuss this further, then please do not hesitate to contact me. I enclose a copy of the school's Debt Recovery Policy and procedures for your information.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs M. Jones
Headteacher

Appendix L

Debt Letter Two L

Date:

Dear Hirer,

Re: Invoice _____

I am writing in reference to the outstanding invoice for £.....

I've been advised that you have not yet contacted the School Business Manager to discuss a weekly payment plan as suggested in my previous letter. I must therefore advise you that continued non-payment could result in referral to the school's legal services provider (Essex County Council).

Please telephone the office, as a matter of urgency, to make an appointment to see me to discuss this matter further.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Mrs M. Jones
Headteacher

Appendix M

Debt Letter Three L

Date:

Dear Hirer,

Re: Invoice _____

Please be advised that as we have yet to receive payment for this invoice, in line with the school's Debt Recovery Policy and procedures, a copy of which was sent with the last letter, I have no option but to refer this outstanding debt to the school Governors.

The School Governors will refer the matter to our legal services provider (Essex County Council) and will contact you in due course over the action they will take, which could include making a claim in the small claims court.

Yours sincerely

Mrs M. Jones
Headteacher