Winnall Primary School

Debt Policy

Ratified by Resources & Finance: June 2026

Review due: June 2027

Introduction

This policy has been created to ensure the appropriate procedures are in place to deal with debts and the recovery of assets. It encompasses all debts owed to the School, Winnall Primary school, including but not limited to, payment for goods, services, school trips and school meal payments. The Governing Body has a duty to ensure the School receives all funds due so that neither the School nor its stakeholders are disadvantaged.

This policy has been written in recognition of the difficulties we face in balancing the social welfare of pupils in our care with the responsibility of managing the School Budget. The Debt policy aims to reduce the risks of parents/carers incurring large debts that they may struggle to pay at a future date and to help identify any financial hardships facing our families so that we can make appropriate interventions to support them. This policy will also help us to minimise the amount of staff time taken to chase outstanding payments.

The consistent and fair approach identified in this policy will help parents and carers to understand the School's procedure and what is expected of them. Any debt incurred by the school, whether small or large, must be reimbursed from the school budget. This limits spending in other areas to the detriment of the school's educational provision in the long term.

The School's preferred method of payments is via Arbor. The School does not accept cash payments for items unless agreed in advance.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the School's Charging & Remissions policy.

Key Information

All chargeable services provided (see charges and remissions policy), including hot meals, music tuition and residential trips MUST be paid for in advance. The School will request a voluntary donation towards educational enrichment (curricular) trips.

Chargeable Services

Hot Meals

Winnall Primary School has a duty to provide free school meals to pupils in EYFS, Year 1 and Year 2, but there is no obligation beyond this. If arrears exist, the School can refuse to continue to provide hot meals for those who are paying.

Free School Meals entitlement

You do not have to pay for school lunches if you are in receipt of the following, as indicated in the DfE Free School Meals guidance, March 2024:

- Universal Credit (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more that £7400 as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods)
- Income Support
- Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

- The guarantee element of Pension Credit - Child Tax Credit (provided you are not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for four weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

You can check your eligibility for Free School Meals for your child/children online at https://pps.lgfl.org.uk/

Please note that Free School Meals eligibility is only valid once parents have received confirmation of your child's entitlement. Parents will be required to pay for meals until confirmation has been received.

Universal Infant Free School Meals

Pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 are entitled to receive a Universal Infant Free School Meal under a government grant.
Once pupils reach Year 3, parents will be required to pay for school meals unless they meet the Free School Meal criteria as outlined in this Policy.

Additional/optional extras;

Activities listed below are considered additional and optional extra services which can be purchased via the school.
All of the additional/optional extra activities must be paid for in advance. If a debt is accrued in school meals the school reserves the right to remove access to the any or all of the optional extra activities listed below (debt is considered transferable)

- Instrumental music lessons
- Wraparound
- Residential trips

Instrumental Music Lessons

Music Tuition is an optional extra-curricular activity that parents choose for their child to participate in. As such, parents are required to pay for their child's music tuition a term in advance of the lessons commencing. Where payment is not made, pupils will not continue to have access to the lessons. Parents will be sent a reminder before the debt is passed to Hampshire Council. After four weeks of lessons, where a child continues to learn from one academic year to the next, and payment is not received, parents will be informed in writing that their child's lessons will cease forthwith.

Wraparound Fees

Wraparound fess are payable in advance.

Residential Trips

All residential trips are payable in advance.

Trips/Activities

Where activities take place outside of school hours and are chargeable (see charging and remissions policy), and parents choose to send their children on them, for example, residential trips/extended day trips, they are expected to pay in full for the trip in advance of the trip taking place.

Offsetting of Income

If a parent owes money to the school, but is in credit with another activity, for example the parent has paid fora trip which is subsequently cancelled, the school has the right to offset some/or all of the credit towards settlement of the debt before issuing any refunds to the parent. Similarly, if a parent is in debt for an activity, i.e. music tuition or a residential trip, but then pays for an alternative item, such as another school trip, the School reserves the right to offset the income to the previous debt.

Year 6/Mid-year Leavers

Where debts occur at the end of the Summer term, and remain unpaid when the child leaves the School will pass the debt to younger siblings if they are still on roll at the School. Debts which remain if a child leaves the school will be pursued via email/letter and passed to Hampshire Council Legal team to pursue.

Payments

All payments for chargeable services should be made in advance using the Arbor online system. Parents can choose how frequently they make payments to their Arbor accounts. This could be weekly, monthly or termly. Please be aware there is a processing cost associated with every payment. If you have any difficulty accessing the Arbor system please contact the School Office immediately.
Parents are able to set up a payment plan to bring the arrears up-to-date.

Payment Plan

When payments agreed in the Payment Plan (sufficient enough to cover the ongoing costs and pay off past debts) are made on time, the service provision will continue. If regular payments are not made, the plan will be withdrawn.

Debt Recovery

The Headteacher will ensure that the level of outstanding debt is regularly monitored. Where payment for services is not received in advance and arrears accumulate, the following procedures will apply:

Informal reminder – Parents will be informally reminded in person/by email/letter home that monies are owed

First formal warning – For school lunches, if the debt remains after two weeks a formal reminder letter will be sent by the School requesting immediate payment. For other services the first formal reminder letter/email will be sent after the due date of the payment. We appreciate that from time to time, financial difficulties do arise. If this is the case please let the school know as

soon as possible so that we can see if there are any ways in which we might be able to help, or refer you to somewhere that can.

Second formal warning – If a payment plan is not agreed and debt is still outstanding one week after a first formal reminder, the School will invite you to have a meeting with the finance officer to discuss the reason for non-payment.

Third formal reminder – If the debt is still outstanding one day after the meeting, a letter will be sent to the parent advising them that the School will no longer provide the service. If the debt is for school lunches, your child will no longer be given a hot meal. Parents will be required to provide a packed lunch for their child until the debt is cleared and their Arbor account is balanced. If the pupil repeatedly attends school with no packed lunch and the debt remains unpaid, the family may be referred to children's services under the category of neglect.

Final formal reminder letter - If there is no response to the third reminder letter the parent will be invited to meet a member of the Governing Body to discuss how the debt will be settled. Failure to respond to this letter and/or failure to attend this meeting will result in the school passing the debt to an external debt collection agency. Parents may be advised that they will be required to pay in advance for all future supplies and services or the supply will no longer be available to them. This decision and its basis will be recorded and reported to the Resources Committee and/or Governing Body.

If a mutual agreement cannot be reached or if any agreed repayment is missed then the debt will be transferred directly to Hampshire County Council.

Legal Action

Please note that the Headteacher and Governing Body reserves the right to take legal action to recover debts.

Waiving of Debts

The waiving of debts is at the discretion of the Headteacher and the Governing Body. A debt may be waived when it is believed the family is experiencing serious financial hardship. Please contact the School if you feel this applies to you.