



'Spurring each other on with love'

School Meals Debt Policy 2026-2027

POLICY HISTORY (starting with the new cycle started in 2011)

Policy / Version Date	Summary of change	Governor adoption Date	Signed by the Chair	Next Review Date
1	Model policy used	March 2020		Spring 2021
2	Changes made to reflect current processes.	18 th March 2021		Spring 2022
3	Reviewed by HD, reminder letter updated	17 th March 2022		Spring 2023
4	Reviewed by HD, 'Spurring each other on with love' added to the letter	24 th February 2023		Spring 2024
5	Reviewed by CJ, sentence changed re applying for FSM and fax number removed from Appendix 2	21 st March 2024		Spring 2025
6	Reviewed by HD	11 th March 2025		Spring 2026
7	Reviewed and no changes made.	19 th March 2026		Spring 2027

As from 21/3/19, Bickleigh Down CE (Aided) Primary School has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy relating to the school meal service.

If debts are incurred, then the school budget has to pay for them. This means that money which should be spent on the children's education is used to pay for debts incurred by parents. Every parent will agree that this is unacceptable and we request that all parents give this policy their full support.

Parent/s must pay in advance for the school lunch online using the School Gateway.

Children will not be provided with a school lunch unless it is paid for, except those that are entitled to free school meals. If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance. However, once identified, this debt must be paid immediately and future meals must be paid in advance before any meal is provided. The school office will contact parents by text if lunches have not been paid for and this is not a regular occurrence.

If the debt is not cleared, parents must either provide a packed lunch or take the child home for lunch. In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the head teacher will phone the parent to ask them to pay online immediately. Otherwise, they must provide sandwiches before lunch time or arrange to take their child home for lunch.

If payment of the debt is not received, the Headteacher reserves the right to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt. Social services may also be informed that these parents are not carrying out the responsibility of care by not providing food for their children at lunchtime.

We hope that, by implementing this debt policy, we are able to help parents manage school dinner money better and at the same time ensure that all money that is for children's learning is available.

Parents who are in receipt of any of the following are entitled to free school meals:

- Universal Credit (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods).
- Income Support (IS).
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance (IBJSA).
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (IRESA).
- The guaranteed element of State Pension Credit.
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, that does not exceed £16,190).
- Working Tax Credit run-on (the payment you get for a further 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit).
- Children who receive a qualifying benefit in their own right can also get free school meals.

This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. Help is available with your application at the school office or apply by clicking the link on our school website.

Any concerns in relation to this policy should be discussed with the Headteacher.

Appendix One

Debt policy implementation

Key Information

1. A copy of the debt policy is available on the school website.
2. All school lunches must be paid for in advance.
3. No child should be sent to school with no money in their account and expect to be given a meal.

Level 1	<p>Indicator: A child's account goes into debt.</p> <p>Check 1: Is this a FSM child, are dates correct? Check 2: Is there a possibility that payments have not been credited? Check 3: Does this parent normally pay on time, is this just a one off?</p> <p>Action 1: an automated message is sent from schoolcomms once the balance falls below -2 x lunches (see below). This message is sent every time a meal is taken until payment is made.</p> <p>\$SchoolMember's lunch money balance is below \$BalanceThreshold\$. Please visit School Gateway to top up their balance. (Text message) \$SchoolMember's lunch money balance is below \$BalanceThreshold\$. Please top up their balance. (App message)</p>
Level 2	<p>Indicator: The debt is still unpaid or a smaller debt has been outstanding for more than ½ a term.</p> <p>Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct? Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited? Check 3 has this parent made contact?</p> <p>Action 2: send a 'debt reminder' by text once the debt falls below £20.00 (see below)</p> <p>Please can you pay the outstanding lunch money for \$Forename\$. Debt notifications are now automated, we would appreciate prompt payment once these are received.</p>
Level 3	<p>Indicator: The debt is still unpaid.</p> <p>Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct? Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited? Check 3 has this parent made contact?</p> <p>Action 3: A phone call to the parent/carer is made by the school office to ask them to pay online or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime or arrange to take their child home at lunchtime.</p>
Level 4	<p>Indicator: The parent does not comply with any of these options</p> <p>Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct? Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited? Check 3 has this parent made contact?</p> <p>Action 3: send 'strong debt letter' Appendix 2 The Head teacher will send a final letter.</p>
Level 5	<p>Indicator: The parent consistently does not comply with any of these options</p> <p>Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct? Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited? Check 3 has this parent made contact?</p> <p>Action 4: bring in outside agencies – refer to Devon County Council and consider social care involvement.</p>

APPENDIX 2



‘Spurring each other on with love’

School Drive, Woolwell, Plymouth PL6 7JW
☎ 01752 301837 **Email:** admin@bickleighdown.devon.sch.uk
Headteacher: Mrs Tameka Hue Hamilton

Dear Parent,

Re: Unpaid Dinner Money

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child despite numerous text messages and telephone calls.

As at 01/01/20XX your account is showing a debt of £-----. Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately using the secure online payment system, School Gateway.

Since non-payment for school meals affects the quality of service we offer to the children, we need to ensure that all payments are up-to-date. If the debt is not cleared by the end of this week, it will not be possible to provide your child with a school meal and you will need to make your own arrangements for your child’s lunch. **In addition to this, all further meals required must be paid for in advance.**

The school reserves the right to begin legal proceeding to recover the debt and to inform social services of our concerns that you are not providing a meal for your child at lunch time. If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately.

Thank you in anticipation of your co-operation.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher