



Sharps Copse Primary School
Prospect Lane
HAVANT
Hants
PO9 5PE

School Debt Policy 2023 – 2026

Date:	18 th May 2023
Review Date:	April 2026
Responsibility:	Headteacher
Statutory, recommended or additional:	Recommended
Checked against Equalities Policy:	Yes
Linked Documents: Child Protection, Safeguarding, Charging & Remissions, Educations Visits & Trips Policies and current Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE)	

Chair of Governors: Mrs J. Towers	Date: 18 th May 2023
Headteacher: Mr M. Elsen	Date: 18 th May 2023

1.0 Statement of Intent

This policy has been written to help our school to adopt a consistent approach to debt with a view to complete elimination. It provides clarity and consistency in managing debt and will also help parents and carers clearly understand what is expected of them.

Services provided by Sharps Copse Primary School are no different to those provided by any other business in that meals and other services must be paid for in advance and on demand. Most parents and carers understand that they cannot take their child to McDonald's and expect the provision of food or services without paying, or expect a football coach or music teacher to teach their child(ren) free of charge.

However a minority of parents or carers do not pay on time for services provided by the school, putting the school in the position of subsidising these few families with funding that is intended by law for all children, as well as causing considerable extra work for office staff and embarrassment for all concerned by chasing outstanding money owed to the school.

The Governors at Sharps Copse Primary School take the stance that the best system of approach is a '**NO DEBT**' policy. We understand that it may seem a very hard stand as there has been a culture of debt tolerance, and that this will be tough to implement. However, it should become easy to maintain once parents and carers realise our school only offer free school meals to children whose parents or carers qualify for Free School Meal (FSM) entitlement and/or Universal Free School Meals (UFSMs), applicable to children in Years R – 2.

Parents and carers should be aware that where there is an outstanding debt at school, access to other services eg, Before and After School Activity Clubs will not be permitted until the debt is cleared.

1.1 School lunches

Children will not be provided with a school lunch unless it is paid for in advance (except for those children entitled to FSMs and/or UFSMs).

The charge for a school lunch is £3.00 per day (prices @ 1st June 2023), per child; if your child(ren) have a school lunch every day, therefore £15.00 should be paid on Monday morning by using the school's on-line SCOPay payment system; details which are provided by the school office at the point of a child's admission to our school. If a child is absent, a credit will be given against the next weeks' lunches.

If a parent or carer genuinely forgets to pay or has left their child's packed lunch at home and is unable to return, the school may grant a debt allowance of one meal per child, and is dependent on whether there are other school debts. However this debt must be paid by the end of the day of receipt or at the latest the next day and future meals must be paid for in advance before any more meals are provided.

Parents and carers of children who arrive without their packed lunch will be contacted and asked to pop back with the lunch, make an on-line payment for a school meal or make arrangements for their child to be collected for a home lunch before **10.30am** so that their child can be told what has been arranged, and in time for the office staff to order a school meal from the kitchen if required. After this time the school meals are being prepared and cooked.

If a parent and carer makes no attempt to clear the debt or provide a packed lunch for their child(ren), the school will send a final letter from the Headteacher warning that legal proceedings may be taken. Once this final letter has been issued, their child won't be able to receive school lunches for the remainder of the term and Children's Services will be informed that these parents or carers are not carrying out their responsibility of care by not providing food for their children at lunchtime.

1.2 School Lunches Debt policy implementation

Level 1

Indicator: Child(ren) arrives without the means of a lunch or had arrangements made for them to go home at lunchtime.

Action 1:

- Admin staff telephone/text message parent or carer requesting they make an on-line payment for a school lunch, provide a packed lunch or make arrangements for child(ren) to go home for lunch.
- If parent or carer is unable to return to school and requests school provides a school lunch, agrees to pay before the close of day or at latest the next morning.

Level 2

Indicator: Child(ren) continues to arrive without the means of a lunch or had arrangements made for them to go home.

Action 2:

- Admin staff telephone/text message parent or carer requesting they make an on-line payment for their child(ren) to receive a school meal, provide a packed lunch or make arrangements for child(ren) to go home for lunch.
- Admin staff also ask if they think they may be entitled to FSMs and provide link for checking eligibility or offer to help with access the website at www.hants.gov.uk/hc3s
- Admin staff generate debt letter from Tucasi system, which will also indicate that no more meals will be provided by the school.
- Admin staff also complete the school's Child Protection on-line Management System (CPoMS) notification form to flag up issue of concern.
- School will contact Children's Services for advice.

Level 3

Indicator: Child(ren) still continues to arrive at school without the means of lunch or had arrangements made for them to go home for lunch and debt(s) remain outstanding.

Action 3:

- The Schools Business Manager, Mrs Setterfield phone's parent or carer inviting them into school to help set-up a re-payment plan if hardship is being experienced or to check FSM eligibility at www.hants.gov.uk/hc3s

- The Headteacher sends a final outstanding debt letter and advises that legal proceedings may begin.
- School contacts Local Authority and Children's Services for advice.
- The school will no longer provide a school lunch.

2.0 Other services eg, Before and After School Activity Clubs

The school purchases supplies and resources in advance for the above clubs and has to pay staff to run our breakfast and after school activity clubs, so it is essential that sufficient funds are available. If there are insufficient funds from those parents and carers who use these services, the school has to cover the shortfall from the schools' main budget allocated for all children. That would be unfair, illegal and unsustainable. Children will not be admitted to the Breakfast or After School Activity Clubs unless parents and carers have paid in advance of attendance.

All parents and carers are emailed in advance when fees are due to be paid every month (or 4 weeks, depending on month beginning and ending), and after population of expected attendance, payable in advance of their child(ren)'s attendance. Our expectation is that payment to the school is made within 7 days of receipt, failure to do so will put their child(ren)'s placement at risk.

Adjustments will be made in lieu if children are absent due to illness or if attending other afterschool clubs within the school. All other absences will be charged for if the school is not notified in advance.

2.1 Breakfast and After School Activity Club Debt policy implementation

Level 1

Indicator: A child's account goes into debt.

Action 1:

- Extended Schools staff generate a reminder on SCOPay Communications system to parents and carers that advanced payment is due to be paid at the beginning of the month.

Level 2

Indicator: A child attends Breakfast or After School Activity Clubs whilst account remains in debt after 7-day clearance due date.

Action 2:

- Extended Schools staff monitors funds by marking in the register day of receipt and amount to admin use
- Extended Schools staff reminds parent or carer when child is being dropped off or collected.

Level 3

Indicator: A child continues to be sent to attend Breakfast or After School Activity Clubs whilst outstanding debts remain uncleared in account.

Action 3:

- The Schools Business Manager, Mrs Setterfield phone's/text message parent or carer to ask them make an on-line payment as soon as possible or placement is at risk of suspension.
- Monitors, and if remains in debt then child(ren) is/are removed from club.
- Headteacher may begin legal proceedings to recover debt.

3.0 Key Information

- A copy of this debt policy is available to view by visiting the school website at www.sharpscopse.hants.sch.uk and available as a hard copy from the office
- Services provided by the school including lunches or before and after school activity club care must be paid for in advance.
- Parents and carers should not send their child(ren) to school without funding and expect the school to provide them with school lunches or attend before and after school activity club care.
- Parents and carers who don't want their child to have a school lunch should provide a healthy packed lunch or make arrangements for them to go home at lunch time.
- All parents and carers are provided with a copy and made aware of this policy at the point of their child's admission to the school.
- Parents and carers who experience difficulty paying for a chargeable service offered by the school, should inform the school office immediately. In most circumstances a payment plan can be agreed to help parents clear their debt to the school as soon as possible.
- Large debts, that parents and carers are unable or unwilling to pay may be passed to a professional debt collection agency to legally recover on behalf of the school.
- Parents and carers are reminded of this policy annually at the beginning of the academic year and periodically throughout via parents post and the school website.

4.0 Monitoring and Review

The Governing Body will review and monitor outstanding debts from information contained in a termly debt report provided by the schools Admin Officer, Mrs Jolliffe, to make a decision about pursuing outstanding debts through legal proceedings or to write-off.

This policy is monitored and reviewed by the governing body **every 3 years** or earlier if deemed necessary.