

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The effective management of debt is important to the success of any school. The Headteacher and Governors of Hazeldene School have a duty to ensure effective use of the school budget to raise standards and maximise the achievement of pupils.

As part of our community cohesion strategy, we do however believe that we have a wider social responsibility. We need to ensure that there is a balance between the competing needs to maximise income collection and ensuring that parents/carers who are historically shown to be our debtors are treated in a fair and equitable manner.

In order to ensure that the required balance is applied in the recovery of debts, the Governing Body has developed a Debt Management Policy.

The aims of the policy are:

1. To ensure a professional, consistent, and efficient approach to debt collection.
2. To effectively pursue all debts owed to the school ensuring that those with the means to pay do.
3. To consider fully the debtors circumstances and ability to pay and so distinguish between the debtor who won't pay and the debtor who genuinely can't pay.
4. To ensure that debts are managed in accordance with legislative provisions and best practice.
5. To treat the individual consistently and fairly, regardless of age, sex, gender, disability and sexual orientation and to ensure that the individuals' right under Data Protection and Human Rights legislation are protected.

DEBT RECOVERY

The School Business Manager collects and recovers the key sources of income. The most likely causes of debt are pupil school meals, nursery and careclub provision. None payment of debt could leave the school vulnerable. Procedures for the management of debt are documented in the School Finance Manual (Under the heading Debtors Accounts & Write Offs) as well as the Bedford LA guidance on debt recovery.

PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

It is important that the school is not seen to be colluding with parents or individuals in the non-payment of monies owed. Therefore, prompt action should be taken. These should include:

School Meals

1. Reminding parents/carers that school dinners should be paid for in advance.
2. Not allowing parents/carers to owe debts of more than 2 weeks.
3. Text messages and phone calls to chase up outstanding debts.
4. Helping parents/carers make alternative school meal arrangements until their debt is cleared e.g. collecting pupils for home dinners or sending in a packed lunch.

Nursery & Careclub Invoices

1. Remind parents/carers that invoices must be paid promptly
2. Not allowing parents/carers to owe debts of more than 2 months
3. Phone calls to chase up outstanding debts and sending reminder invoices for payment
4. Remind parents/carers that no further bookings will be taken until debt is paid
5. Where a debtor's payments are regularly or consistently paid outside the terms of supply the Headteacher must consider withdrawal of credit facilities and request the individual to pay for facilities at the time they are booked.

Residential School Trip

The payment for school trips can place a severe burden on some families. On most occasions, the trip is subsidised by the school. Parents/carers should be given the opportunity to pay in instalments. Pupils should not be prevented from participation because of parents' inability to pay or make a contribution (see Charging Policy). Parents/carers must however be reminded that on some occasions, the trip could be cancelled if we do not receive enough contributions.

Debt Recovery

1. We will actively pursue the collection of monies that are owed.
2. As part of our debt recovery strategy, we will try to negotiate mutually satisfactory arrangements to make full settlement.
3. Further debt cannot be incurred until settlement has been made especially in the case of dinner money ~ except in severe hardship cases and at the sole discretion of the Headteacher.
4. As a school, we will take account of the health, well-being, and educational needs of our pupils and take steps to ensure that the inability of parents/carers, who on occasions are unable to meet their financial responsibilities due to reasons beyond their control, are not excluded from school activities. Notwithstanding this, the school cannot prejudice its own financial viability in order to provide relief to its debtors.

Equal Opportunities Implications

The way in which the school treats people must be fair and equitable. Adherence to the policy should ensure equality in the school's approach to debt recovery.

Community Cohesion and Human Rights Implications

Debt recovery could have human rights implications especially for vulnerable members of the school population such as refugees or asylum seekers and will need to be carefully managed to ensure that the action is appropriate, transparent, and proportionate.