



Leigh Academy  
**Paddock Wood**

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Principal: Tom Moore

# School Meal Debt Policy

## September 2025

Date of next review: September 2026



## **School Meal Debt Policy - Years 3 to 6**

This policy has been produced to help adopt a consistent approach to debt incurred by parents whose children take school meals. It provides clarity and consistency in managing debt and will help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

This policy does not apply to parents of children eligible for free school meals. If parents believe that their children may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals please contact the school office for more details. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. Free school meal entitlement will only apply from the date the school receives confirmation from the Local Authority. It cannot be backdated.

Leigh Academy Paddock Wood wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue debt for school meals which they then find difficult to clear. **Leigh Academy Paddock Wood 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 some parents. Every parent will agree that this is unacceptable, and we request that all parents give this policy their full support.

## **Process of Payment for School Meals**

School meals must be paid for in full, in advance, using MyChildAtSchool (MCAS).

## **Responsibilities**

### **Parents**

- All school meals must be paid for in full, in advance via MCAS.
- No child should be sent to school with no/low credit on their MCAS account and expect to be given a meal
- Parents who don't wish their child to have a school meal should provide a suitable packed lunch.



## School

- All parents will be provided with a copy of this policy via MCAS and the website
- To follow the School Meal Debt Policy consistently
- If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school will grant a debt allowance for two days (once per term). However, this debt must be paid by the next day and future meals must be paid in full, in advance, before any meal is provided.
- Where parents are struggling to provide a packed lunch support will be offered via Charlotte Gunning (Pastoral Lead) with access to food bank vouchers.
- In exceptional circumstances the school reserves the right to provide an alternative to a cooked school meal (eg. sandwich), in cases where the School Meal Debt policy has been exhausted or persistently ignored.

## Debt Policy Process

### Stage 1 Child registered for school meal with no or low credit on MCAS - account goes into debt

**Check 1:** Has the child been registered correctly?

**Check 2:** Does this parent normally pay on time?

**Action 1:** Automatic MCAS reminder sent

**Action 2:** Is this a one off? School meal provided. Email sent - School Meal Payment Reminder - request to clear outstanding balance and apply credit if needed for further meals.

**Action 3:** **If a repeat :** Parents will be contacted by phone and email - either payment must be made via MCAS by 10.30am or parents should provide a packed lunch. If neither or these are received the school will provide a sandwich as an alternative to the cooked school meal.

### Stage 2 Child again registered for school meal without payment on MCAS increasing the amount owed

**Check 1:** Has the child been registered correctly?

**Check 2:** Has payment been made via MCAS?



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- Action 1:** School meal provided. Email sent - School Meal Payment Request - request to clear outstanding balance and apply credit if needed for further meals. Notification no further meals will be provided until payment is made to clear the outstanding balance and the account has sufficient funds to cover the cost of further meals.
- Action 2:** **If a repeat:** Parents will be contacted by phone and email - payment must be made via MCAS by 10.30am or parents should provide a packed lunch. If neither or these are received the school will provide a sandwich as an alternative to the cooked school meal to avoid a situation where the amount owed is increasing. Parents must provide a packed lunch until the outstanding balance is cleared and the account is in credit to cover the full cost of further meals.

### Stage 3 Parent consistently does not comply with any of these options

- Check 1:** Has the parent made contact?
- Action 1:** A member of the Senior Leadership team will contact the parent directly regarding payment for school meals.
- Action 2:** Letter sent: No further school meals will be provided without payment by 10.30am. Parents must provide a packed lunch for their child if they are unable to make payment by this time. Social Services may also be informed that parents/carers are not carrying out the responsibility of care by not providing food for their child at lunchtime.

We hope that by implementing this policy we are able to help parents manage school meal payments better and at the same time ensure that all money that is for children's learning is used for just that purpose.