



Debt recovery, charging and remissions policy

Introduction.

At Surbiton Children's Centre Nursery Nursery School, the majority of children are in receipt of their free 15 hour entitlement. The Governing Body recognises the valuable contribution that a wide range of additional activities can make towards each children's personal and social development in this time. e.g. cooking, short walking trips to the park or shops, special visitors, hatching eggs, butterflies, the farm. The Governing Body aims to promote and provide such activities as part of a broad and balanced curriculum for the children.

The school also offers additional sessions that can be paid for by parents. This could be in the form of our Lunch club, additional nursery sessions The school will also offer parent and toddler groups at the school. There is a charge to families who wish to attend these sessions. This is led by the Children's Centre.

The school aims to charge one month in advance in every situation to prevent parental debt to the school. Should debts accumulate, we will take all reasonable measures to vigorously collect debts as part of our management of public funds. A debt will be written off only after all reasonable measures (commensurate with the size and nature of the debt) have been taken to recover it. The school's debt recovery policy will observe the relevant financial regulations and guidance set out in the Scheme for Financing Schools published by Kingston Council, Section 48 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and Schedule 14 to the Act, School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2014 and any other legal requirements.

Charging.

Any charges made by the school must meet the requirements of the Education Reform Act 1996. The governors endorse the guiding principles contained in the Act, in particular that no child should have his/her access to the curriculum limited by charges. The Governing Body may, from time to time, amend the categories for which a charge may be made and our debt collection model will be applied to these circumstances. The Governing Body reserve the right to revise this Policy as necessary.

Charges.

No charge can be made for education and care during a child's 15 hour entitlement. However, a voluntary contribution will be asked for activities within school. The governing body or head teacher make it clear to parents that there is no obligation to make any contribution. If an activity cannot be funded without voluntary contributions, the governing body or head teacher will make this clear to parents at the outset. It is important to note that no child will be excluded from an activity simply because his or her parents are unwilling or unable to pay. All children will still be given an equal chance to engage in visits and activities in the nursery.

The Governing Body reserves the right to make a charge in the following circumstances.

- Voluntary Contributions – the Governing Body may ask parents for a voluntary contribution towards the cost of any activity that takes place during school hours. At Surbiton Children's Centre Nursery we suggest a termly contribution, which is aimed at meeting costs and not exceeding costs i.e. the school does not aim to profit from any voluntary contributions. In the event of insufficient voluntary contributions being made some activities may have to be cancelled.
- Lunch Club the school offers lunch club sessions, these have an option to include hot food. These sessions are over and above the 15 hour free entitlement and therefore carry a cost, which is paid for in advance of the sessions.

- Additional Nursery Sessions –The school offers some additional paid for nursery sessions. These sessions are over and above the 15 hour free entitlement and therefore carry a cost.
- Loss, damage and breakages - in cases of loss, damage or breakages of school books or activity packs on loan to parents the school make a charge to cover the cost of replacements.
- Uniform – The school sells uniform from the office and aims to do this and make no profit on this. Uniform items are paid for at the point of sale.

Charging Procedures.

Payment for charged sessions in the nursery.

1. A deposit is paid on accepting a place in a charged session at the school. The place cannot be secured without the deposit and a signed contract.
2. The contract details the dates that payments are due for the academic year and the amounts to be paid. The payments are all made in advance, for the term ahead.
3. **Initial 'overdue payment' reminder and first written 'overdue payment' reminder.** If a payment has not been received by the allocated date, nursery staff will contact the parents within 2 working days. An email will then be sent to parents to re-iterate this information, and a copy will be kept in the school files.
4. **Second written 'overdue payment' reminder (APPENDIX 2).** Within a week of an outstanding balance not being received an email will be sent to parents reminding them of the balance owed and setting a new deadline for payment of 2 weeks after the original deadline for payment. A copy of this email will be kept in the school's files. At this point parents will be offered the opportunity to talk to the finance officer or the head teacher about the remissions procedures. Parents will be informed at this stage that their child's space in the additional paid sessions will be offered to another family if the balance is not received.
5. **Failure to settle the debt.** Should the balance remain outstanding by the extended deadline the child will not be able to attend the charges sessions at the nursery, and the deposit will not be refunded. A letter will be sent to parents from the head teacher informing them of this, and a copy of the letter will be kept in the school's files and the finance, premises and pay governor committee will be informed.

Payment for Lunch club.

6. During the first half term of the academic year, once a start date is confirmed in lunch club, an emailed invoice will be sent to parents. The balance for the first half term will be due within 2 weeks of the invoice being sent out.
7. Subsequent half termly payments for lunch club will be made in advance of attending the sessions and parents will book for a session or number of sessions each week for a whole half term.
8. Invoices will be sent to parents each half term, with a date that the balance is due by.
9. **Initial 'overdue payment' reminder and first written 'overdue payment' reminder.** If a payment has not been received by the allocated date, nursery staff will contact the parents within 2 working days. An email will then be sent to parents to re-iterate this information, and a copy will be kept in the school files.
10. **Second written 'overdue payment' reminder (APPENDIX 2).** Within a week of an outstanding balance not being received an email will be sent to parents reminding them of the balance owed and setting a new deadline for payment of 2 weeks after the original deadline for payment. A copy of this email will be kept in the school's files. At this point parents will be offered the opportunity to talk to the finance officer or the head teacher about the remissions procedures. Parents will be informed at this stage that their child's space in the lunch club will be offered to another family if the balance is not received.

11. **Failure to settle the debt.** Should the balance remain outstanding by the extended deadline the child will not be able to attend the lunch club at the nursery during the next half term. A letter will be sent to parents from the head teacher informing them of this, and a copy of the letter will be kept in the school's files and the Finance, premises and pay governor committee will be informed.

Difficulties with payment.

Debtors are expected, whenever possible, to settle the amount owed by a single payment as soon as possible after receiving the first 'overdue payment' reminder. As part of our charging process, parents are offered an opportunity to discuss difficulties with making a payment with the head teacher or finance officer. It may be possible for the school to break the payments down into more manageable chunks through a payment plan, in all cases, a letter will be issued to the debtor confirming the agreed terms for repayment. The settlement period should be the shortest that is judged reasonable.

A sensitive approach to debt recovery will be carried out, taking the following factors into account.

- Hardship – where paying the debt would cause financial hardship.
- Ill health – where our recovery action might cause further ill health.
- Time – where the debt is so large compared to the person's income that it would take an unreasonable length of time to pay it all off.
- Cost – where the value of the debt is less than the cost of recovering it.
- Multiple debt – where someone owes more than one debt to the School. In this situation an attempt to agree one repayment plan to include all debts will be established.

Remissions.

Where the parents of a child are unable to meet any one of the charges the school may make they can apply in confidence to the head teacher for the remission of charges in part or full. The head teacher in consultation with the finance committee will make authorisation of remission.

Writing off debt.

In general, payment for all goods and services supplied by the School should be collected in advance or 'at the point of sale'. In line with the local authority's 'Scheme for financing schools' the Governing Body is empowered to write off debts providing the debt has been outstanding in excess of six months and the Governing Body is certain the debt is unrecoverable. The Director of Children's Services will write to schools each year asking for details of debts written off and this will be reported to the appropriate committee of the Authority.

Reporting of outstanding debt levels

The Head teacher will ensure that the level of outstanding debt is monitored each half term. Records will be maintained to detail individual debts and the total value of debt to the school in order that it can be determined at any time as detailed in appendix A. These details will be reported to the finance, premises and pay committee with any action that has been put in place to recover the debt.

