Charging & Remissions POLICY 2023 - 2024

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Charging and Remissions Policy 2023/24

Introduction

The aim of this policy is to set out:

- the school-related activities where the school may levy a charge
- the general principles to be applied in calculating any charge
- The principles and methodology of any debt recovery
- the principles to govern any remission of charges

This policy has been established with the framework of legislation, rules and guidance laid down by the Department for Education (DfE). Any legislation and binding DfE rules within that framework will always take precedence over this policy. That framework is complex with regular updates and the DfE publishes guidance notes in the interest of clarification in application. Since the school is bound by any legislation and rules within that guidance, it is not reiterated in this policy document, which focuses on those activities where the school may charge.

General Principles

The following over-arching principles will apply:

- The Governing Body wishes to promote a wide range of activities, experiences, and opportunities for all pupils, regardless of background and means
- Education in the public sector provided during school hours is intended to be free of any direct compulsory charge
- The Governing Body must ensure that the Delegated School Budget is not used for purposes which go outside the agreed scope for such funding
- The additional financial capacity providing by the Pupil Premium should focused on closing the attainment gap and spending decisions will be tested against that criterion. Spending is therefore likely to be concentrated in areas and activities which are directly related to the national curriculum, access, and attendance
- An acknowledgement that full cost of activities is unlikely to be recovered from charges given the high levels of staffing and resources required for our pupils

Activities for which a Charge may be levied.

Subject to the over-arching guidance referred to in the Introduction, the school may levy charges in the following areas:

A. Materials, books & equipment
B. 'Optional extras'
C. Voluntary contributions

See relevant sections below for details

A. Materials, Books & Equipment

All books and equipment that are a requirement at school will be provided free of charge. However, should any items not be returned in good order for re-use, parents/carers can be liable for the cost of replacement.

Charging a refundable deposit is consistent with this policy. A charge may be levied where the parent/carer wishes to retain ownership of the items for themselves or for the pupil. In calculating the cost of replacement where items are not returned fit for reissue, the school may not make a profit but may include a 10% additional cost for administration.

B. Optional Extras

The DfE defines 'Optional Extras' as follows:

- Education outside of school time that is not part of the National Curriculum or an essential part of the syllabus for a public examination for which the pupil is being prepared by the school
- Examination fees where preparation is not part of the school timetabled curriculum
- Board & lodging for residential visits
- Transport not associated with education during school time
- Materials, books & equipment provided for 'optional extra' activities

The Governing Body agrees that the school may make charges for providing 'Optional Extras' as defined above, with participation in the related activity being dependent upon meeting the charge. The school may not derive any element of profit from such charges but may levy an administration charge of up to 10% of cost.

Breakfast & After School Clubs

Where possible, any extra curriculum activity will be determined by pupil preference in coordination with school improvement priorities. Dependent on the activity, the level of staffing will vary and consequently activity costs will range. Due to the need and safety of the pupils, Springwell School is committed to maintaining the same staffing ratios for 'optional extra' activities as those ratios maintained in class.

The school & Governing Body acknowledge that due to the required levels of staffing and resource, where possible, the school will subsidise the true cost of provision so that it is affordable to the pupils and their families. The school will fundraise through private lettings and fundraising activities to ensure we can continue to offer a broad, rich, and varied before and after school provision. The school aim to break even across all Optional Extra activities.

The school reserves the right to determine the use of any fundraised funds across all areas of school operations. Where the fundraising does not meet the cost of subsidising 'optional extra' activities, or the Governing Body agree that the funding should be used for other priorities, then the school will notify users of the reduction/removal of any 'optional extra' activity.

(The charging and debt policy for extra curriculum activities is in Appendix 1)

C. Voluntary Contributions

The Governing Body approves that the school may seek voluntary contributions at any time and for any purpose. The most typical (but not the only) example will be a school trip which does not fall within the definition of an 'Optional Extra'. However:

- It must be clearly stated whether charges are mandatory (where permitted) or voluntary

- Any voluntary contributions must be genuinely voluntary. In particular, there may be no consequences arising from declining to provide a voluntary contribution which differentiate between donors and non-donors (e.g., if a trip is to be supported by voluntary contributions it may be cancelled altogether if there is insufficient voluntary financial support, but it may not be scaled back to include only pupils of parents/carers who do contribute)

- Where an activity is to be funded from voluntary contributions the Governing Body delegates to the Co-Headteacher the right to cancel the activity if sufficient financial support is not forthcoming

- Where an activity is to be funded from voluntary contributions the basis for selection of pupils in the event of over-subscription must be clearly stated and must avoid selection based on contribution

School Trips

It follows from the above that school trips will fall into one of two categories as defined by DfE:

- 'Educational Visits': These are visits/trips/activities which either take place wholly or mostly within school-time or are an essential part of the National Curriculum or of a syllabus for a public examination for which the pupil is being prepared at school. The cost of board & lodging may be passed on as a mandatory charge, but any other costs may only be passed on to parents/carers on the basis of 'Voluntary Contributions' as defined above

- Other visits not classed as 'Educational Visits': These visits etc are classed as 'Optional Extras' and the cost may be recovered on the basis of a mandatory charge as defined above, i.e. participation will be dependent upon meeting the individual charge

Voluntary Contributions for 'Educational Visits' may embrace any of the costs of providing the activity but typically:

- Travel costs
- Insurance
- Entry fees
- Staff transport & accommodation
- Support staff payments
- Costs of covering absent teachers

Where voluntary contributions exceed the final cost of the visit, refunds will be made where the surplus is greater than 10% of the total of all contributions received or is greater than £5 per head.

Typically, the requested voluntary contribution will include entry fees and travel costs.

Tariff of Specific Charges

The setting of the specific tariff within the principles set out in this policy is delegated to the Co-Headteacher.

Debt Policy – School Meals

(The charging and debt policy for extra curriculum activities is in Appendix 1)

Springwell School is responsible for the collection and reconciliation of all school dinner money and is liable for all arrears and non-payments. Parents/Carers are responsible for providing a lunch for their child(ren), this may be in the form of a paid meal or application of a free meal entitlement. Parents must pay for school meals IN ADVANCE unless their child(ren) have a free school meal entitlement. If your circumstances change, please notify the school if you believe you may be eligible.

Springwell School has a clear set of procedures for the payment and collection of school meal money and any arrears that occur.

- School meals should be paid in advance using Parentmail. Electronic payment can also be taken over the phone and in person in the school office.

- A text/email will be sent on the final day of credit to notify that limit has been reached.

- If payment is not received and the outstanding balance reaches £12.50, a second text/email will be sent to chase any outstanding payments the following week.

- If payment is still outstanding, then the admin office will phone the parent/carer to discuss the matter.

- In the 3rd week of arrears, the parent/carer will be expected to provide a packed lunch for their child. They will also be invited into school to meet with the Head of Business & Operations or Deputy Head to discuss the debt.

- The parents will be required to send packed lunches for their child(ren) until the debt is cleared and a credit balance is deposited in the Parentmail account.

- In the event that the debt is not recovered, and packed lunches are not provided from home, school will notify the Local Authority of the debt and instruct them to begin debt recovery proceedings.

Remissions

The Governing Body may agree to remit all or part of the cost of activities involving identified pupils. Authorisation for such decisions is delegated to the Co-Headteacher

Our approach to the remission of certain other types of costs is set out below:

Uniform: For those students in current receipt of Pupil Premium one complete set of school uniform will be provided at 100% remission of costs

Curriculum resources: For those students on the Pupil Premium register there will be 50% remission of costs

- Trips which are an essential part of the curriculum: For those students on the Pupil Premium register there will be 100% remission of costs

- Trips/After School Clubs outside school time which are not part of the curriculum: No remission of costs (Given the high staff: pupil ratio, after school clubs are heavily subsidised by fundraising activities so that all pupils can access the opportunities).

- Residentials: For pupils in current receipt of Free School Meals there will be 50% remission of charged costs

Hardship Fund

In circumstances of family hardship parents/carers may apply to the School Business Director for financial support towards the cost of a school activity from the school's hardship funds. The test for hardship will be registration for Free School Meals. The remission may be up to 50% of the total cost of the activity up to a maximum of £200. Decisions are delegated to the Headteacher on a day-to-day basis. The procedural documentation is available from the Finance Office.

Appendix 1
Springwell School
After School or Holiday Activities Charging Policy

Statement of Intent –

Springwell School aims to provide a high quality and affordable out of school club experience for all children when financial resources allow.
We aim to:

1. Ensure everyone feels valued and respected and has an equal chance to do their best.
2. Help children develop a positive attitude, self-respect, and respect for others, and learn to take responsibility for their own actions.
3. Understand and meet children's individual needs, especially those of vulnerable pupils.
4. Ensure all achievements are recognised and celebrated.
5. Create a caring, safe, purposeful, and calm environment which promotes children's wellbeing.
6. Develop positive and supportive relationships between children, parents, school and the wider community.

We will work with parents to claim benefit entitlement.

This Policy has been established to provide transparent fee information, set procedures for the payment of fees and create a framework for dealing with non-payment in a swift and fair manner.

Parent/carers should be made aware of and given access to this policy and the school's procedures.

It will be included on the school's website and made available to view at the school on request.

Acknowledgement

Given the high volume of staffing required for pupils with complex needs, the school aims to subsidise some or all the activities after considering the nature of the activity. The shortfall will be income generated through letting and hiring of the school facilities.

The Governing Body has agreed to not use Pupil Premium to fund after school clubs. Given both the high level of staff ratio and increasing number of pupil's eligible for premium funding, we wanted to ensure that all pupils had access to the opportunities.

Fees

- Fees are calculated as per session per child for children from Reception through to Year 6
- Consent will be obtained for any activities that incur additional expenditure (i.e. entry fees, resources, etc.) as these costs will be passed to the parent/carer
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Payment information for Activity Clubs

- Places are secured by payment in advance.
- Payments will be made via Parentmail
- Parent/carers will be required to pay fees in full by the commencement of the first session. If payment not received by this time, the place will be offered to the next child on the waiting list.
- Fees continue to be payable when a child is absent from a club. If a child is absent for a long period due to illness, the School Business Director will decide on a case-by-case basis as to whether fees will need to be paid for the period of absence and that decision will be final.
- If an absence is known and the place is filled by another pupil, then the absentee's account will be credited with the session.
- If a club is cancelled, then the attendee's account will be credited
- One weeks' notice and payment of fees for the notice period will be required to withdraw your child from provision.

Late collection

- Staffing ratios must be maintained at all times. If a child is collected late, this can lead to staff needing to stay beyond the end of their normal working hours. Parent/Carers will be charge if more than 10 minutes late to collect. This will incur a £5.00 charge for the first 15 minutes beyond 3.10pm and then a further £5.00 for each subsequent 5-minute period.

Difficulty with payments

- Springwell School will work with parents to ensure all avenues for assistance with payments are explored. Parents may face financial difficulties and, understandably, would like to ensure as little disruption to their child's care as possible. Parents and carers experiencing such difficulties should contact the School office as early as possible, to reach a suitable arrangement for both parties.

Debt collection

- The Governing Body has a duty to ensure the school receives all the funds to which it is entitled including Club fees.
- The Governing Body will not write off any debt which exceeds £200.

- A full record will be kept of debts owed to the school for 7 years. This will include all letters requesting money, reminders, and invoices.
- Where a debt remains unpaid the Club, and subsequently the school, will not provide any further services that incur charges, items of uniform, etc., – unless full payment is made in advance.
- The school itself will not initiate legal action to recover debts. However, we will refer uncollected debts to the local authority to consider such action.

Roles and responsibilities regarding debt collection

The Co-Headteacher and Head of Business & Operations will ensure that:

- Letters and final reminders requesting money are accurately recorded and those records maintained.
- Evidence of the steps taken by the school in pursuance of debt is recorded including dates and times of both letters and phone calls.
- The use of the hardship fund to support access to out of school provision
- The privacy of the family involved will be respected and only made known to those who need to know.

The Governing Body:

- Will prescribe and regularly review the arrangements for debt recovery.
- Will delegate its responsibilities under this policy to the Co-Headteacher and School Business Director.

The process for pursuing debts

1. **Informal reminder** – Within 2 days of late payment, the debtor will be informally reminded by text, email or by telephone that they owe money to the school.

2. **First formal reminder letter –** If the debt is yet to be paid one week after an informal reminder, a formal letter will be sent to the debtor.

3. **Second formal reminder letter** - If the debt is yet to be paid one week after a first formal reminder, a second formal letter will be sent to the debtor. These letters allow the debtor every opportunity to settle their debt and ensure the school can prove all reasonable steps have been taken to recover the debt should the issue proceed further.

4. **Final reminder letter -** If no response is received following the second reminder, the school will send a letter to the debtor advising them that they will be referring the matter to the local authority to consider legal action.

5. **Possible legal action** – If no payment is made the local authority will decide whether to take legal action against the debtor.

The waiving of debts

- The waiving of debts is at the discretion of the Co-Headteacher and the Governing Body. A debt may be waived when it is believed the debtor is experiencing serious financial hardship or if all reasonable avenues to recover the debt have been exhausted and it is believed it would not be cost effective to pursue the debt through legal action.
- The Co-Headteacher is authorised to waive off debts of up to £50 in each academic year.
- Debts between £50-£200 will only be waived with the approval of the Governing Body.