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Batford Early Years Centre

Charging and Remissions Policy

Next Review date: December 2017

Signed.....Head of Centre / Headteacher Date: 16.12.2015

Signed.....Chair of Governing Body Date: 16.12.2015

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Batford Nursery



Children's Centres



Skylarks Day Care



Batford Nursery



Skylarks Day Care

Batford Nursery School's policy on charging for school activities and debt recovery. (Based on the guidance provided in the 'Governors' Guide to the Law')

In general, no charge can be made for admitting children to maintained schools. Where education is provided wholly or mainly during school hours, it must be free. However, the school may charge for activities outside of school hours where these are not a necessary part of the curriculum.

Voluntary Contributions

The Headteacher or Governing Body may ask parents for a voluntary contribution towards the cost of:

- any activity which takes place during school hours;
- school equipment;
- school funds generally.

The contribution must be genuinely voluntary and the pupils of parents who are unable or unwilling to contribute will not be discriminated against. Where there are not enough voluntary contributions to make the activity possible, and there is no way to make up the shortfall, then it will be cancelled. Parents will be charged for activities organised outside the school day (3 hrs session)

Removing financial barriers from disadvantaged pupils

The governing body has agreed that some activities and visits where charges can legally be made will be offered at no charge or a reduced charge to parents in particular circumstances. This remissions policy sets out the circumstances in which charges will be waived. Skylarks, Batford Nursery School's day care provision has its own policy and procedures for charging and remission of debts.

Refunds

Where an activity makes an unexpected surplus the school will consider making a refund. In accordance with the guidance set out within the HCC Financial Handbook for Schools', Batford Nursery School will make a refund where the surplus is either:

- 5% or more of the total cost per person, or
- £5 or more per person

Surpluses will be reimbursed in 'round amounts' only, e.g. £3 not £3.29. Where a refund is offered, the accompanying letter will indicate that 'a surplus of £x has been made and that if the parent / carer would like to take advantage of it they should contact the office by a date two weeks in advance. If the school is not contacted by that date it will assume that the refund has been donated to school funds.' All refunds will be made in cheque format in order to maintain a clear audit trail. Refunds donated to the school will be transferred to an appropriate budget heading, following approval from the Headteacher. Where an activity makes a surplus, refunds will be issued by the school administrator, in accordance with the school's charging and refunds policy. Any remaining balance is transferred to school funds and is used to support children on future activities. Where an activity results in a deficit, this will be made up from the school's private fund account.

Late collection of children

Any child who is not collected from nursery within a reasonable time at the end of a session and without previous notification of an exceptional and good reason why the child is being collected late, will then be considered as requiring provision of care outside the funded hours. As we provide Day care for parents needing wrap -around care outside school hours, the full sessional charge will be applied in these circumstances. The rate for such after-hours care will be charged at the normal Skylarks rate for the session.

Debt recovery policy

Batford Nursery School will take all reasonable measures to vigorously collect debts as part of its 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. Batford Nursery school's debt recovery policy will observe the relevant financial regulations and guidance set out in the Financial Handbook for Schools and any other legal requirements. In particular:

- the Governing Body will not write-off any debt belonging to the school which exceeds £50. Any sums above this will be referred for formal agreement of the County Council's Finance Director obtained before writing-off. (If any debtor has a number of debts which together exceed the write-off limit then these will be treated as a total amount).
- a formal record of any debts written off will be maintained and this will be retained for 7 years .
- Batford Nursery school will not initiate any legal action to recover debts, but will refer any debts which it has not been able to collect (unless a decision to write-off the debt is demonstrably a reasonable course of action) to the County Secretary to consider taking legal or other action to recover the debt.
- the school will NOT write-off any debt belonging to the County Council or another party, e.g. debts for school meals. If in doubt as to the appropriate action to collect any such debts the school will seek advice promptly from officers of the County Council. School staff are expected to apply the following procedures to secure the collection of all debts. Recording of goods or services supplied where payment is not received in advance or 'at the point of sale'. A record will be kept of all such supplies that details what was supplied, the value, the date(s) and the identity of the 'debtor', e.g. parent, hirer, etc. Where invoices are raised these should state the date by which payment is due. In all other cases correspondence with parents, etc. should indicate the maximum period that the school regards as reasonable before payment is overdue, e.g. contributions for a school trip should be received by, payment for items purchased should be sent to the school office by, etc. The Headteacher should determine what the reasonable 'credit period' is if this is not otherwise specified.

Initial reminders

Initial reminders may be informal and made either in person (when a parent comes to collect/drop off the child) or by telephone. Normally, the school administrator will undertake this duty, having built up a good relationship with the parents.

First reminder letter

A first formal reminder letter should be issued after 2 weeks from any informal reminder / the date of supply, If action is to proceed further, it is necessary to prove that all reasonable attempts have been made to recover the debt, and that these attempts have been made in a timely manner, i.e. at the time that the debt first became overdue.

Second reminder letter

A second reminder letter will be issued in 3 weeks after the first reminder letter.

Using reminder letters

Should a debt need to be taken beyond two reminder letters, formal written evidence may have to be produced. It is therefore important that at least one, but preferably two, written reminders are sent. Details of all reminders, whether verbal or in writing, should be maintained. Where a letter is issued, a copy must be retained on file.

Failure to respond to reminders / settle a debt

If no response is received from the reminders issued, a letter will be sent to the debtor advising them that the matter will be referred to the County Secretary's Department, Legal and Administration. At the discretion of the Finance Committee, the debtor may be advised that they will be required to pay in advance for all future supplies or the supply will no longer be available to them. This decision and its basis will be recorded.

Negotiation of repayment terms

Debtors are expected to settle the amount owed by a single payment as soon as possible after receiving the first reminder letter. If a debtor asks for 'repayment terms' these may be negotiated at the discretion of the Headteacher. A record of all such agreements will be kept. A letter will be issued to the debtor confirming the agreed terms. The settlement period should be the shortest that is judged reasonable. The Headteacher will decide whether any debtor who has been granted extended settlement terms will not be offered any further credit and will be required to pay in advance in future.

Costs of debt recovery

Where the school incurs material additional costs in recovering a debt then the Finance Committee will decide whether to seek to recover such costs from the debtor. This decision and its basis will be recorded. The debtor will be formally advised that they will be required to pay the additional costs incurred by the school in recovering the debt.

Reporting of outstanding debt levels

The Headteacher will ensure that the level of outstanding debt is known / can be determined at any time. The Finance Committee will monitor the level of outstanding debts to determine whether this level is acceptable and whether action to recover debts is effective. (Monitoring of outstanding debts may be differentiated by type, e.g. if school meal debts prove more of a problem than those for lettings of premises then the frequency and degree of monitoring should reflect this).

Bad debts

Write-off of any debt requires the written approval of the Finance Committee of the Governing Body up to a maximum of £500. A record of the write-off, the reason for it, and the approval for it, will be retained for 7 years. Any debt belonging to the County Council will be referred to the appropriate officer for consideration/action without delay once the school has taken reasonable measures to collect the debt (i.e. has followed the reminder notification procedures set out above). In the case of school meal debts the procedure set out in the School Meals & Milk Administration Handbook will be followed.