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PE lessons suffer after charges raised

A school has been hit with a five-fold hike in charges to use a park for PE lessons in a sting which could leave them with no alternative site.

St Stephen's Junior School has paid Richmond upon Thames Council £450-a-term for more than 18 years to hold games lessons on nearby Moorhead Park. Now, it wants £2,400-a-term.

Acting headteacher Jo Cheadle-Maruta said: "We are being penalised on all fronts - we only have a small playground and no grassy area, so need to use outdoor green space for all

our games activities to fulfil the requirements of the national curriculum."

The school in Winchester Road, St Margarets, now faces an annual bill of more than £7,000 for facilities which it argues most other schools have no need to pay for.

In addition, the school claim the park is not kept fit for use by its seven-to-11-year-olds, with at least three pupils each week coming back covered in dog excrement. Staff have also reported problems with teenagers drinking alcohol and disturbing lessons held in the park.

Parent governor Alison Targett said: "The

school believes parents are already paying for the use of the park with their council tax."

Mrs Cheadle-Maruta added: "The council say the charge is for painting lines on the football pitch, but people aren't charged to walk their dogs there or sit with picnics."

A council spokesman said: "The department is investigating the school's concern for the charges over Moorhead Park.

"Pitch charges have only been increased in line with inflation.

"The council is committed to encouraging children to use our parks for sports."

Why can't kids play for free?

Sir - Looks like Richmond council is introducing yet another random increase in charges.

They want to charge St Stephen's School £7,200 per year to play football and games on Moorhead Park (previously £1,350 per year). Here's an idea - why not let the school use this public space without charge?

St Stephen's School does not have its own playing field and it's playground is adjacent to the A316 and hence full of CO₂ emissions.

Why not use the revenue from the increased CPZ charges linked to CO₂ emissions to subsidise the maintenance of the goal posts and paint the white lines at Moorhead?

There should not be a charge for children to run around in (marginally) fresher air during games lessons when they have nowhere else to go.

Cynthia Lunson
St Margaret's