



## Dallimore Primary and Nursery School

### Policy for Collection of Dinner Money

#### **Background**

This Policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners. The Local Education Authority is not accountable for the administration of dinner money collection or debt and the responsibility falls on the school to pursue instances of non-payment. As a result the school budget will have to directly fund any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered thereby directly affecting the amount of money that is available to provide education to all pupils.

#### **Provision of School Meals**

The Schools Meals Service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for by someone. Free School Meals are available for parents who meet certain criteria including the receipt of state benefits. Anyone who may qualify for Free School Meals should contact the school office for further information. Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that all parents/carers who qualify take up their child's entitlement so that they can receive a School meal each day. All KS1 children are entitled to universal free school meals.

Information on the entitlement to free school meals for KS2 children and an application form for parents and carers can be found on the Derbyshire County Council's website:

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/school-places/primary-admissions/parentsguide/more-information/school-meals/am-i-entitled-to-free-school-meals.aspx>

If a child's entitlement to free school meals expires or the parents/ carers personal circumstances change the parent/carer must provide a packed lunch or make payment for a school dinner via parent pay.

## **Cost of School Meals**

School meals are available to children at a cost of £2.20 per day or at no cost to those in receipt of Free School Meals entitlement or Universal Free School Meals. School meals must be paid for in advance via the online booking system ParentPay. Any revision to the school meal prices will be notified to parents/carers the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

## **Payment for School Meals**

Meals should be booked via the ParentPay website and payment made at the same time. Payment can be made for one day's meal, or for the whole term. The cut off time for booking a child's meal is 7.00am on the morning of the meal. Cash payments are not accepted in School for school meals. Bar codes can be provided if a parent/ carer does not wish to open a parent Parent Pay account. However if this option is chosen the parent must inform the office after payment made which days the payments refer to in order to ensure that their child receives a meal on the required day(s).

## **Management of School Meal Debts**

On an ad hoc basis the Office can book a child for a school meal for a parent, if the 7.00am deadline has passed. In exceptional circumstances this can be done without payment but it is always encouraged to ask the parent to credit the parent pay account with the funds first. Office must chase this debt up and aim to do this for no more than a maximum of 2 days.

If a child arrives at school without a packed lunch or payment, or if a child's entitlement to free school dinners has ceased, the School will telephone/text the parent/carers in the first instance to establish if alternative arrangements have been made.

When a child has failed to produce dinner money the school may allow a meal to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary situation. e.g. Lost or forgotten dinner money, temporary hardship etc.

If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a phone call or/text detailing how much is owed will be made to the parent/carers requesting payment directly via ParentPay. Prompt action will be taken to address any debt issue at an early stage in order to prevent arrears amassing.

Where a child continues to require meals, the School must establish if the child is entitled to free school meals, or if the parent/carers is experiencing hardship which affects their ability to pay. Under these circumstances the parent/carers should be

invited to apply for free school meals or speak confidentially to the Head Teacher/School Business Manager.

When the debt exceeds £20 for a child or family a formal letter must be sent to the parent/carer informing them to provide their child/children with a packed lunch to prevent further arrears. If the child/children is/are not provided with the requested packed lunch and the parent/carer cannot be contacted, the School will provide a sandwich and a drink only (Example letter 1).

If the debt exceeds £50 for a family and/or action proves unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, the School should inform the local Safeguarding Team and formally write to the parent/carer, explaining that the School is not obliged to provide a school dinner where advance payment is not forthcoming or where authorisation for free school dinners has not been received (Example letter 2).

### **Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts**

The School Office is responsible for administrating and collecting the fees for school meals. All effort should be made to chase any debts promptly and efficiently. Any amounts owing should be caught up on the day with a telephone call or message to the parent/ carer. The Head teacher has the discretion to write off any dinner money debts he or she believes is in the best interest of the child. Reasons for the write off and no further action being taken should be recorded.

However, any debts that are above £50 and proving difficult to collect should be reported to the Governors and provide Governors to decide if formal action should be taken. The aim of the School's dinner money policy is to minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up and incurring costly referral to the School's solicitors. The School does however, reserve the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal debts and inform the local authority that a child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

**This Review date: Spring 1 2022**

**Next Review Date: Spring 1 2025**

## Example – Letter 1

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

(Address Line 1)

(Address Line 2)

(Address Line 3)

(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

### **School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)**

According to the School's financial records you have not paid dinner money for your child (pupil name) in Class: xx. As at xx/xx/xx your account is showing a debt of £xx.

In order that the school's budget is not used to clear your child's debt please make arrangements for the outstanding dinner money debt to be paid immediately. Once you have cleared the current debt I should be grateful if you could ensure that you keep your account in credit. The current cost of a school meal is £x per day or £x per week.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information. **Remember that Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify, your child will then receive a School meal each day.** Additional information and an application form can be found on the Derbyshire County Council's website or in the school office if you do not have access to the Internet:

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/school-places/primary-admissions/parentsguide/more-information/school-meals/am-i-entitled-to-free-school-meals.aspx>

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or wish to discuss the matter further please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

## Example – Letter 2

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

(Address Line 1)

(Address Line 2)

(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

### **School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)**

I am writing regarding the current level of outstanding school meal debt that is showing on your account. Despite previous correspondences and messages the debt for your child xx in Class xx is still outstanding. The School's records show that as at xx/xx/xx your account is £x in debt. The current cost of a school meal is £x per day or £x per week.

I would ask that you please make arrangements to clear this debt immediately and take steps to ensure your account is kept in credit in the future.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information. **Remember that Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify, your child will then receive a School meal each day.** Additional information and an application form can be found on the Derbyshire County Council's website or in the school office if you do not have access to the Internet:

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/school-places/primary-admissions/parentsguide/more-information/school-meals/am-i-entitled-to-free-school-meals.aspx>

Since the School has to fund all school meal debts from its budget it is essential that all payments are up to date so that the quality of the service provided to all pupils is maintained. Unfortunately, if the debt is not cleared by xxxxx a school meal will no longer be provided to your child and you must make your own arrangements for your child's lunch. The School reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the outstanding debt and to inform the local authority that your child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

Jan 2022