



School Meals Payments Policy and Procedures

Principles

1. Decisions relating to school meal payment policies are delegated to the Headteacher as an operational matter.
2. Administration and monitoring of school meals accounts is the responsibility of parents/carers. The school will support parents/carers in this process.
3. Policies and procedures in relation to school meal payments will be based on:
 - Ensuring that procedures are manageable for the majority of parents/carers
 - Effective use of public funds, including staffing resources and acceptable levels of debt to be funded by the school's delegated budget

Procedures

Payment Methods

Cash is not accepted as a payment means.

Payment Deadline

1. Parents/carers ensure there is credit for the following week's meal by Friday of the previous school week. Credit for at least 3 meals (currently £6.00) is required.
2. Accounts are checked once a week by the school office on a Friday morning of school weeks. Anyone who does not have sufficient credit is sent a text message reminder to pay by 2pm.
3. At 2pm each Friday (during school weeks) anyone who does still not have sufficient credit are logged in the system and meals are unavailable for ordering the following school week (the account is fixed to packed lunches).

Monitoring of accounts

Parents/carers are provided with an online account that they can monitor at the own convenience. The system offers the facility to see their balance at any time, set up text reminders when their balance is running low and make payments.

Responsibility to ensure that there is sufficient credit for meals lies with parents/carers.

The school will support parents with this responsibility by checking accounts on their behalf once a week. The most effective time to do this is on a Friday to ensure that the balance is live and covers all meals taken in that week. The text messages sent by school as a result of this monitoring carry a cost and therefore can not be sent more than once a week.

Rationale

The procedures request a credit of at least 3 meals which allows a maximum debt of £4.00, should a child have 5 meals in the week. This is the maximum debt level the

school has decided to manage given that non paid debts are funded by the school's own budget.

We request the payment to ensure credit by Friday of the previous school week for a number of reasons:

- a) To give parents/carers at least 3 days notice that they do not have enough credit for the following week and therefore enough time to shop/make arrangements for packed lunches
- b) To allow enough time for the administrative processes that follow (entering of data into the school meal systems) before Monday morning when children start ordering their meals at registration time.
- c) Taking regular account of credits made later than Friday and at any time in the week would require high levels of dedicated administrative time. The school does not have the resources to do this.
- d) The school office is not open in holiday time due to employment contracts. As a result school days are used for administrative processes.

Consistent application of this procedure from January to March 2016 has reduced the cost to the school both in terms of the amount of debt funded by the school and the level of staffing resources dedicated to management of parents/carers' accounts. This benefits the children and ensures responsible use of public funds.

Debt Collection

The school will communicate clearly to arrange collection of debt. This will be through a variety of means including phone calls, text messages, emails and letters.

Unpaid debt lasting more than 8 weeks will result in the family's account(s) being fixed to packed lunches for the remainder of the academic year. No further paid meals will be permitted for the remainder of the year. This may be reconsidered in the new academic year following discussions with the family and clearance of the arrears.

This will not affect free school meals.

Meal ordering

Children order their meals at registration time each morning. If their account is locked to packed lunches (following the procedure undertaken by the office on the previous Friday) and can not be changed by the teacher they are sent to the school office. Parents/carers will then be called and asked to bring a packed lunch.

If the parents/carers haven't or can't provide a packed lunch

If the account has been credited later than the deadline but before the meal is being ordered the school may provide a school meal at its own discretion. This will not normally be offered if ongoing communication has resulted in a failure to follow procedures by the parents/carers.

If there is insufficient credit, the parents/carers can't provide packed lunch or ongoing communication with the parent has failed to result in them following procedures, alternative provision may be provided. This will not usually be a school meal and will not be in the dining hall.

Financial Difficulties

The school acknowledges that failure to follow the procedures may be a result of financial or other circumstances. The school will encourage parents/carers to discuss

this and offer necessary support. A plan will be developed with the parents/carers to ensure they can follow the procedures in the future.

Communication

This policy has been communicated clearly to parents/carers via newsletters and a letter since January 2016. The policy has been communicated to all new starters and is on the school website.

An email was sent to all families to communicate the new meal price of £2.00 from September 2016.