



Dunston Hill

Community Primary School



School Meal Payment Policy

September 2021

DUNSTON HILL COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOL

SCHOOL MEALS PAYMENT POLICY

This policy has been written to help our school adopt a consistent approach to debt incurred by parents whose children take school dinners. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

There will occasionally be a decision to be made about whether a child should be refused a meal in school if they have not paid. However, the school meals service is no different than any other business and the meals must be paid for by someone.

Parents should be able to relate to the situation that they cannot take their child to a restaurant e.g. McDonalds and expect them to be given food without paying. Yet a minority of parents in the school expect us to provide food for their children without paying for it. The Free School Meals system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals.

It is very time consuming for the Office Staff to continually chase parents for money - by letter, phone call or in person. It is also highly embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative effect on our relationships with families.

The school will make parents aware of this policy in the following ways:

- A letter to parents
- Reminders in the school's newsletter
- The school prospectus
- The school website.

Background

The 1944 Education Act made it an entitlement for pupils to receive a free school meal. This entitlement was scaled back in 1949 when a flat charge of 2.5 pence was introduced. Over the next thirty years this flat fee was gradually increased, until in 1980, legislation was introduced to remove the requirement for Local Education Authorities to provide a meal for every pupil. Since that date, authorities have been obliged only to provide a meal to those pupils who are eligible for a free meal.

Therefore unless the child is in receipt and eligible for a free school meal it is the parent/carers responsibility (NOT THE SCHOOLS OR THE LOCAL AUTHORITY) to ensure the child is adequately fed. This can mean by providing the money for a school meal in advance, providing a packed lunch on the day or taking the child home/off the school premises to be fed.

Our Procedures

We are a cashless school and we ask parents/carers to pay for their child(rens) meals via the school's gateway app. Notifications are automatically sent to parents/carers to top up their accounts once they are below the £10 threshold per week.

The following procedures are in place to deal with any issues that arise if the parent/carer does not adhere to their responsibility towards feeding a child:

On the first occasion that a child arrives at school with no lunch or lunch money and before the child is given any food the school should contact the parents to -

- Inform them that the child has no packed lunch or lunch money (on the school gateway app)
- Inform them that they are responsible for feeding their child and that a failure to provide either lunch or lunch money may result in a referral to children's services as a neglect issue
- Ask the parents if it is their intention to collect the child and take them home/off the premises to provide a lunch for them
- Inform them that the school can provide the child with lunch, at a cost, and inform them of the cost
- Ask the parents to consent to the school providing the child with food; and
- Inform them that they must pay for the cost of the food within seven days.

If the parents give this consent, the school should provide the food and then write to the parents (by handing the letter to the parent/guardian on collection of the child at the end of the school day but not to the child to hand over) -

- Setting out what has happened
- Noting that the parents agreed (verbally or in writing) to the child being fed and to pay for the food
- Asking them to make payment within seven days for the food that has been provided; and
- Informing them that if payment is not received, no more food will be provided to the child
- Inform them that they are responsible for feeding their child and that a failure to provide either lunch or lunch money may result in a referral to children's services as a neglect issue.

This can then be used as evidence of there being a contract in place should legal proceedings be necessary.

If on the first occasion that a child arrives at school with no packed lunch or there is insufficient funds on their account and the school is unable to contact the parents that morning, they should feed the child on this occasion, but write to the parents as detailed above -

- Informing them of what has happened
- Informing them of what steps they took to contact the parents and asking them to update any contact details if necessary
- Asking them to make payment within seven days for the food that has been provided; and
- Informing them that if payment is not received, no more food will be provided to the child.
- Informing them that they are responsible for feeding their child and that a failure to provide either lunch or lunch money may result in a referral to children's services as a neglect issue.

If the parents do not pay for the food then a further letter should be sent to the parents after the seven days informing them that the school will **not** provide any more food.

If after that point the child arrives at school with no lunch or lunch money and the school decides to feed the child, they will be doing so by their own volition and should not expect the parents to pay for it or the Council to absorb it through invoicing and writing off.

Therefore, the school is gifting the meal from their own budget! It is important to be aware at this stage that if the parent is neglecting their responsibility to feed their child that other neglect may also be going on in the household and the school has a duty to report this neglect to children's services.

If the child arrives at school with no lunch or lunch money and the school decides not to feed the child, it should contact the parents to inform them that -

- The child has no lunch or lunch money
- The school will **not** provide the child with lunch; and
- If the parents do not provide the child with lunch on or off the premises or lunch money, the child will not be fed as this responsibility lies with the parent.

If the parents do not resolve the situation and the child is not fed, a letter should then be given to the parents, as detailed above and handed in person –

- Setting out that the child arrived at school with no lunch or lunch money
- That this is not the first time this has happened
- That the school has previously informed the parents in writing that the child would not be fed if it happened again - giving details of the previous occasion and a copy of that letter
- That the child was not fed
- That a copy of the letter will remain on file as evidence that the parents have not made adequate provision for the child's welfare
- And Children's Services will be informed of the neglect.

Approved: Finance & Staffing Committee 29.9.21

Review Cycle: September 2022