



Dinner Money Policy

Background

Gamesley Early Excellence Centre Debt Policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners. As the Local Education Authority is no longer accountable for the administration of dinner money debt the responsibility now 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.

Cost of School Meals

School meals are available to children at a cost of £2.30 per day. School meals **must** be paid for in advance. 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

Payments for all meals must be made using ParentPay by Monday morning, where there are problems with ParentPay cash or cheques can be taken by the office.

Management of School Meal Debts

To ensure that the School's budget is not adversely affected by the cost of School meal debt the Governors consider the fairest system to all families is to pursue a 'Zero Tolerance' approach. Although, this may seem harsh to some parents it is important that the school budget is spent for the benefit of all our pupils and not a small number.

If a child arrives at school without a packed lunch or payment, the School will telephone/text the parent/carer 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. however details should be recorded in writing and a record maintained and monitored.

If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a letter/text detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting payment directly to the school within 7 days. The same process will be used if a cheque is not honoured by the bank. 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 parent/carer is experiencing hardship which affects their ability to pay. Under these circumstances the parent/carer should be invited to speak confidentially to the Head Teacher.

When the debt exceeds £10 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 £30 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

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts

At each meeting of the Governing Body/Finance Committee, the Head Teacher will provide Governors with details of any outstanding dinner money debt and the current position with regard to such debt. 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.

All Write-offs of outstanding debt must be approved by the Governing Body/Finance Committee following submission of details of the debt by the Head Teacher together with reasons for no further action being taken.

Sample letter

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 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