St Mary's CE Primary School

'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart.' (Colossians 3:23)

Dinner Money Arrears Policy

Adopted by the Governing body on	25th February 2026
Date of next review:	February 2027

Introduction

This policy forms guidance in the cases of debt arising when parents/carers fail to pay for school meals.
St Mary's CE Primary School is accountable for dinner money debt, we have a responsibility to pursue instances of non-payment. As a result, the school's budget will have to fund outstanding debt, and this directly affects the amount of money available to provide education for all our children. This policy should provide a consistent and fair approach to managing debt and help parents understand what is expected of them.

Meal Charges

St Mary's CE Primary school provides school meals at a cost of £2.80 per day, which can change with prior notice to parents of at least a half term. There is no cost to children in Reception class and Key Stage 1 or those in receipt of Free School Meals entitlement. Payment for school meals, should always be made in advance. Payment must be made online via our online payment system, Parent Pay.

Who is eligible for free school meals?

There are two types of free school meals:

- Government (benefits-related) free school meals
- Universal infant free school meals

Who qualifies for government free school meals?

Free school meals are available to pupils in receipt of, or whose parents are in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits:

- Universal credit (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods)
- Income support
- Income-based jobseeker's allowance
- Income-related employment and support allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guarantee element of pension credit
- Child tax credit (provided you're not also entitled to working tax credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working tax credit run-on – paid for four weeks after you stop qualifying for working tax credit

Who qualifies for Universal Infant school meals?

All children in Reception class and key stage 1 (reception class, year 1 and year 2) are automatically entitled to have a free school meal through universal infant free school meals (UIFSM). You don't have to apply for universal infant free school meals, but in order for your child's school to recognise who is eligible for universal meals and who qualifies for

government free school meals for funding purposes, we encourage all parents who meet the eligibility criteria for government free school meals to apply.

Procedure for collection of arrears

Dinner money arrears are classed as 'arrears' when the following occurs:
• A child requests a school dinner at morning registration and payment has not been received by 9.30am on that day.
• If a child has an 'occasional meal' (Christmas dinner, themed dinner or one-off meal due to exceptional circumstances) and payment has not been received.

School procedures and processes to chase outstanding arrears

1. On a Monday morning a reminder text (appendix 1) is sent to the parent/carer, reminding them that there are insufficient funds in their Parent Pay account. They will be asked to clear any arrears and make payment.

2. If insufficient funds have not been received by the following Monday, Letter 1 (appendix 2) will be emailed and also sent home with the child.

3. If full payment has not been received by 9.30am the following Monday, a text and Letter 2 (appendix 3) will be sent to the parent/carer explaining that no further meals will be provided by the school. They will be advised their child will require a packed lunch until payment is made to clear any outstanding debt.
If a packed lunch continues not to be provided, the school may need to seek support from external agencies to ensure your child's needs are met.

4. If parents/carers do not respond, or a satisfactory arrangement for repayment of the debt cannot be reached, the Headteacher will refer the debt to the Staffing, Finance and Safety Governor Committee. Parents/carers will be invited to attend a meeting with the chair of the committee. If parents contact the school in response to our communication to discuss difficulties paying, an arrangement can be made for repayment by instalments, and dinners can continue to be provided.

Appendix 1

Text message ***Your child/children's ParentPay dinner account is in arrears. Please clear asap, ensuring sufficient funds available for future dinners taken.***

Appendix 2

School meals arrears letter 1

Dear ******

According to our records, your child (name), has chosen to have school dinners recently (dates can be provided) but we have not received payment.

A school dinner should only be provided if payment is received IN ADVANCE.
The school is not obliged to provide a school dinner to your child when payment is not forthcoming, or where official approval for Free School Meals has not been received. Therefore, if payment is not received (within 7 days) you will be required to provide your child with a packed lunch until the debt has been cleared.

To make payment for school meals, please use Parent Pay. The school understands that circumstances do arise which may affect a Parent/Carer's ability to make payments.
The school is keen to assist and support families if we are made aware of any circumstances causing difficulties.

If you think you may be entitled to Free School Meals, please contact the school office.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Milhavy-Jones
Headteacher

Appendix 3

School Meals arrears letter 2

Dear ******

Following our letter dated (date) regarding outstanding dinner money, our records show that this has still not been paid and (name) is still having school dinners.

Due to the nonpayment of school meal arrears, with immediate effect you will need to provide your child with a packed lunch from (date) until the debt is cleared.
In accordance with our School Meals Policy, if payment has not been made, or where an authorisation for Free School Meals has not been received, the school is not obliged to provide your child with a school meal.

Once the debt has been cleared, your child is welcome to resume school meals with payment in advance.

If you would like to discuss the matter, please do not hesitate to contact the school. The school is keen to help and support where we can to try and resolve this matter as quickly as possible.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Milhavy-Jones
Headteacher