

# **NO DEBT POLICY FOR SCHOOL MEALS**



**RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL**  
'EXCELLENCE FOR ALL'



**Ratified by Governors: 6<sup>th</sup> February 2018**  
**To be reviewed: February 2019**

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*Riverside Bridge School*  
**NO DEBT POLICY FOR SCHOOL MEALS**

Review Frequency:	Annually
Date of ratification:	February 2018
Date next review due:	February 2019
Scope of Policy:	This Policy applies to all staff, students, governors and volunteers at Riverside Bridge School

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **Riverside Bridge School Vision**

- Leading Excellence in SEND provision (Excellent support from families)
- Ensuring outstanding person-centred achievement and outcomes
- Including Everyone in Meaningful and Safeguarded Life

In line with the School Vision, we will endeavour to ensure that all our pupils access a healthy lunch, according to their preferences, thus safeguarding them and ensuring they are nourished enough to access meaningful curriculum activities.

We also recognise our commitment to support families and will ensure that, although we are adopting a 'No Debt Policy' with regard to school meals, families are well-informed and supported through the process. Any problems that potentially impact upon a pupil's access to nourishing meals will be resolved as soon as possible.

Staff recognise the need to:

- be vigilant where families are having difficulty paying as this is often a symptom of other issues in the life of the family
- ensure families know how to access free school meals where they are eligible
- work in partnership with families to ensure that debts are cleared
- ensure that public funds intended for the delivery of excellent education are not used to pay for school meals

## **2.0 PROCEEDURE**

### ***Key information***

1. All parents are provided with a copy of the debt policy when their child joins the school.
2. All school lunches must be paid for in advance.
3. Parents who have not paid for a school lunch should provide a healthy packed lunch for their child.

Parents will be taken through a supportive process to recover any debt incurred. This process will include reminders and options that will help you to set up an affordable repayment plan.

Parents will be expected to engage with the process. If a parent is unable to engage, the school will refer to Social Care Early Intervention in order to support the family further.

School meals must be paid for in advance of meals being taken. School meals are charged at £2.30 per day. Parents will be informed of any price increase in school meals as soon as possible. All meals should be paid in advance online (Parentpay) or to the office if access to a computer is not possible. (Cheques should be made payable to Riverside Bridge School.)

Meals may be paid for on a daily, weekly, monthly, half termly or termly basis. If parents choose to pay either half termly or termly and a debt arises at the end of that period, it will be the parent's responsibility to provide the school with an acknowledgement of the debt and ensure that outstanding arrears are paid.

When a child is leaving, it is imperative for the school office to check the balance of the child's account and refund any credit balances or obtain any debt that is outstanding.

The child may be eligible to receive free school meals if the parent is in receipt of the following:

- Income Support
- Income based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigrations and Asylum Act 1999
- The Guarantee element of the State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (providing no entitlement to Working Tax Credit) and Working Tax Credit run-on

The school office can provide information and a form to apply for free school meals. The school will encourage parents to make an application and they should be aware that Riverside Bridge School receives additional funding based upon the number of pupils receiving free school meals. This funding is known as Pupil Premium.

The school will be invoiced for meals taken and it is essential that sufficient funds are credited for these meals. If there are insufficient funds then the school will have to cover the shortfall from its budget.

School meal debts that have been accrued prior to the implementation of this policy must be collected immediately (*see Appendices*).

### **3.0 DEPT PROCEEDURES**

In collecting any outstanding debts, a step-by-step process will be followed. The time lapse between the steps will normally be five school days. However, this may vary depending on factors such as the level of debt and the length of the term. The next step will be implemented if the debt has not been repaid or if there has been no contact made with the school.

#### **WEEK 1:**

Each Tuesday debts will be reviewed and a Parentpay letter will be sent home asking for all debts to be cleared.

#### **WEEK 2:**

A “final debt letter” will then be sent home to those families who have failed to pay after receiving a Parentpay letter and when the debt is over £10.00.

#### **WEEK 3:**

A “withdrawal letter” will then be sent home to those families who have failed to pay after receiving a “final debt letter” and when the debt is over £10.00. This letter will request that the child is provided with a packed lunch until the debt is cleared. If the child arrives at school without a packed lunch, the parent/carer will be telephoned and asked to bring one into school.

#### **WEEK 4:**

If the debt is still not cleared, the school will send home a “payment plan letter”. This will request that parents set up a payment plan in order to clear outstanding arrears.

#### **WEEK 5:**

If families do not respond to the request for a payment plan then they will be sent an “appointment request” letter asking them to make an appointment to see the Headteacher. At this meeting the unpaid debt will be discussed.

#### **WEEK 6:**

If families fail to make an appointment, the school will contact the parents by telephone to arrange a meeting. If this appointment is not kept or a resolution is not agreed, the debt will be referred to the Governing Body and “debt letter 4” will be sent via Royal Mail recorded delivery.

#### **WEEK 7:**

If families continue to ignore the debt, the School Governors will make a decision on the next step to be taken in order to receive payment and at this point they may consider legal advice.

The Governing Body acknowledge that, on occasion, families have financial difficulties and in these proven circumstances the school will work hard with the family to agree a solution which is not to the detriment of the child. In the event of a child leaving Riverside Bridge School with an outstanding debt, the Governing Body will need to consider whether to write off this debt or pursue payment by other means including making a claim in the Small Claims Court.