

NO DEBT POLICY FOR SCHOOL MEALS



RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL
'EXCELLENCE FOR ALL'



Partnership Learning

Ratified by Governors: November 2022

To be reviewed: September 2023



Riverside Bridge School

NO DEBT POLICY FOR SCHOOL MEALS

Review Frequency: Annually

Date of ratification: November 2022

Date next review due: September 2023

Scope of Policy: This Policy applies to all staff, students, governors and volunteers at Riverside Bridge School

Headteacher: Mrs K Cerri
kice@riverside.bardaglea.org.uk
Ext: 201060

Deputy Headteacher: Ms L Amri
leam@riverside.bardaglea.org.uk
Ext: 201100

Assistant Headteacher: Mrs H Clark
hecl@riverside.bardaglea.org.uk
Ext: 201123

Miss B MacKenzie
bema@riverside.bardaglea.org.uk
Ext: 201101

Ms C O'Keefe
chke@riverside.bardaglea.org.uk
Ext: 201123

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Riverside Bridge School will endeavour to ensure that all our pupils access a healthy lunch in line with 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 PROCEDURE

1. All school lunches must be paid for in advance.
2. 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 £2.40 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). 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 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. Parents can apply for Free School Meals online at <https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/benefits-and-support/free-school-meals-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 DEBT PROCEDURES

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 week debts will be reviewed and a letter will be sent home asking for all debts to be cleared.

WEEK 2:

A “withdrawal letter” will then be sent home to those families who have failed to pay after receiving a letter and when the debt is over £5.00. 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. (Appendix 1)

WEEK 3:

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. (Appendix 2)

WEEK 4:

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. (Appendix 3)

WEEK 5:

If families fail to attend the appointment or a resolution is not agreed the debt will be referred to the Governing Body.

WEEK 6:

If families continue to ignore the debt then 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.

Dear _____,

Outstanding Dinner Money

Your son/daughter's ParentPay account now has debit balance on it of £ _____. Therefore, we will no longer be able to provide your child with a school lunch until their balance is restored. You will need to provide them with a packed lunch until the debt is completely cleared. If your child arrives at school without a packed lunch the parent/carer will be telephoned and asked to bring one into school. The account will need to be topped up tonight in order for the balance to show in their account tomorrow. All dinner money should be paid in advance.

A reminder that you can set up email alerts on ParentPay to notify you when your child's balance is low, to ensure this doesn't happen again.

If your household income has recently decreased or you are in receipt of Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, Child Tax Credit, Universal Credit you may be eligible for Free School Meals, whereby your child's lunch is funded by the government. If this may be the case, please go to <https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/benefits-and-support/free-school-meals-pupil-premium> and apply.

If you have any problems logging onto your account or making payments, please contact the school ParentPay administrator.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs K Cerri
Headteacher

Appendix 2

Date:

Dear ,

Outstanding Dinner Money – Payment Plan

I note from our records that we have had no contact with regards to the outstanding debt on your son/daughter's ParentPay account. The outstanding balance is £ .

We are no longer providing your child with a school meal. This will ensure that the debt does not rise any further.

We are happy to arrange for a payment plan to be put in place in order to clear the monies currently owed. Please put a suggested payment plan in writing to the school in order to reduce this debt.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs K Cerri
Headteacher

Appendix 3

Date:

Dear _____ ,

Outstanding Dinner Money

We have written to you previously regarding the outstanding balance on your son/daughter's ParentPay account. As yet we have not received payment or a suggested payment plan.

Your son/daughter is not receiving a school meal.

We request that you attend school for a meeting to discuss this further on:

Date:

Time:

Please confirm your attendance at this meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs K Cerri
Headteacher