



CREATING A CLIMATE FOR GREAT LEARNING,
SUCCESS AND OPPORTUNITY

School Meals Debt Policy

To be adopted by Full Governing Body 20th December 2023
Review Date: December 2025

Responsible Officer: Finance Manager

Rationale

Benton Park School is committed to the safety and welfare of all students. As a school we offer an in house professional catering service ensuring our students have access to a wide range of nourishing and healthy food throughout the day. This supports our students' well-being and enables them to learn and develop effectively.

We recognise that the majority of our families are supportive of the school and ensure payment for all school meals in advance. This policy is intended to outline our clear procedures and protocols for those occasions where debt does accumulate on a child's school meal account. The policy is intended to protect limited school resources whilst at the same time ensuring that parents/carers do not face a rising and unmanageable debt.

School budgets are very limited and costs are incurred in providing a school catering service. Prompt and advanced payment by parents/carers ensures that we are able to utilise our financial resources effectively and in line with government guidance, which is, for the education of the students of the school.

Payment

Items purchased from the school catering service must be paid for in advance. Parent/carers are able to make payment for school meals using our online secure payment platform www.parentpay.com. Individual login details will be provided to parents/carers as soon as their child starts at Benton Park.

Payment can also be made in cash using the revaluation machine in school. This requires students to bring cash into school to top up their account. This is a less secure method of making payment and so use of ParentPay is strongly encouraged. Unfortunately, cheques cannot be accepted for the school catering service.

Without sufficient funds on their catering account, students will be unable to access the school catering service and parents/carers will be required to send their child into school with a healthy lunch and any snacks required for the full day.

We recognise that on occasions parents/carers may forget to top up their child's catering account and pay in advance for any food. We would not want any child to go hungry and so in this circumstance, school may grant a debt allowance of one meal deal at lunchtime. Following this allowance, parents/carers are asked to ensure that the account is paid in full by the next day and any future meals paid for in advance to ensure students have access to a meal on a daily basis.

Free School Meals

Students who are entitled to a Free School Meal will be able to access the catering service up to the value of their Free School Meal Allowance, currently £2.55. This will enable students to purchase a hot or cold meal deal at lunchtime. Students can use the allowance to purchase snacks, but this will limit what they are able to purchase at lunchtime. Parents/carers are asked to discuss this with their child to ensure they are

clear what they are required to use the Free School Meal allowance on. Parents/Carers can if they wish, top up a child's account to enable them to spend above their Free School Meal allowance. Any Free School Meal allowance, or part thereof, not utilised on the day it is allocated will be removed from the student's account.

If parents/carers believe that their child may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals they should contact their City Council for more details. Further details are available on the school website at <http://www.bentonpark.org.uk/school-meals/67890.html>. In addition, application forms are available from the Leeds City Council website. www.leeds.gov.uk. Parents/carers requiring support in making an application should contact the school Finance Office who will be pleased to provide assistance.

This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify.

ParentPay Account – Debt Management

To assist parents/carers in the management of their child's school meal accounts, reminders can be set on the ParentPay system to alert when balances are running low. Parents/carers are strongly encouraged to utilise this facility.

Each day, school will send out a reminder by email to parents/carers where any sum of money, regardless of amount, is owing on the account.

Parents/carers are asked to clear this debt as soon as possible and provide additional funds to cover any future purchases. Alternatively, parents /carers should send their child to school with a packed lunch until such time as they are able to provide funds onto the school meal account.

Where a debt payment is not received following a further reminder, nor a packed lunch provided, the school will phone the parent/carer to ask them to come to school with the money or ask them to pay online immediately. Students without food in school will be provided with a lunch only but will not be able to access any other drinks or snacks at either break or lunchtime. This action will further increase the debt on the account.

Where the debt continues to remain unpaid and the balance reaches £12 or more, the following letters will be sent out by post to the parents/carers registered address as well as to email addresses on the school system. See Appendix 1 and 2.

Where balances are in excess of £12 in debt, no further access will be allowed to the school catering facilities and parents/carers MUST provide adequate, healthy food for their child to access during the school day and failure to do so may be dealt with as a safeguarding matter. Access to trips and visits will also be limited should meal accounts remain in arrears. Any funds paid towards trips and visits will be used to fully clear lunch account arrears first.

In addition, if the debt continues to remain unpaid school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings against parents/carers to recover the debt. Details of this process can be found in the attached flowchart at Appendix 3.

It is recognised that the majority of families do ensure that all school meals are paid for in advance. We also understand that circumstances change for some families, over the course of their child's time with us and any parents/carers experiencing difficulties in making payments for school meals are encouraged to contact the Finance team as soon as possible, to enable appropriate support to be provided.

Appendix 1

Letter for Non-Free School Meal Students

Parents Address

RE: School meal balance owing as at 31/12/2023

Student Name – Amount they owe

Dear Parents Name

Further to several recent communications, our records indicate that you still have significant arrears on your child's school meal account. Unfortunately, until such time as the debt is cleared we must notify you that with effect from 08/01/2024 you must send your child with a packed lunch and snacks each day as they will not be able to access the catering facilities.

May we take this opportunity to remind you that school meals should be paid for in advance and your account should always be in credit.

If you are struggling to make payments due to a change in circumstances and you feel you may be eligible for Free School Meals please check your eligibility in the link below. If you are eligible please contact school on the number below and we will help you with the application.

<https://www.leeds.gov.uk/schools-and-education/apply-for-free-school-meals>

Please note failure to provide your child with adequate food for the school day may be dealt with under our safeguarding protocols. In addition, should the debt remain unpaid we reserve the right to refer the matter to the Leeds City Council Debt Recovery unit which may impact your credit rating with the local authority.

Please be advised that participation in trips and visits may also be impacted by arrears.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter, if you wish to discuss further please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Appendix 2

Letter to students entitled to Free School Meals

Parents Address

RE: School meal balance owing as at 31/12/2023

Student Name – Amount they owe

Dear Parent Name

Further to several recent communications, our records indicate that you still have significant arrears on your child's school meal account. Unfortunately, until such time as the debt is cleared we must notify you that with immediate effect it will be necessary to limit your child to a hot or cold meal deal at lunchtime in line with their Free School Meal allowance of £2.55

This will ensure you do not have an increasing debt to clear but will require your child to bring any additional snacks from home should they require these.

May we take this opportunity to remind you that food purchased from the school canteen that is over and above the daily Free School Meal allowance of £2.55 should be paid for in advance and therefore your account should always be in credit.

Should the debt remain unpaid we reserve the right to refer the matter to the Leeds City Council Debt Recovery unit which may impact your credit rating with the local authority.

Please be advised that participation in trips and visits may also be impacted by arrears.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter, if you wish to discuss further please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Appendix 3 - Debt Management Flowchart

