

Dinner Money Debt Policy

Leighton Primary and Preschool

Adopted by Governors	Autumn 2025
Review Timetable	Annually or as changes required
Renewal Date	Summer 26

Document Control		
Date	Notes	Initials
Oct 2025	Reviewed	KB/CN

1. Introduction and Purpose

This policy outlines the procedures for managing dinner money debt at Leighton Primary and Preschool. It aims to ensure that all pupils have access to a nutritious meal while minimising the financial burden on the school and parents. The policy is designed to be fair, transparent, and supportive, recognising that families may experience temporary financial difficulties. This policy aligns with the school's values of Ambition, Respect, and Community, ensuring that all Pupils are supported to achieve their potential.

2. Legal and Regulatory Framework

This policy is compliant with:

- The Education Act 1996 (as amended).
- The School Food Standards.
- Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR (regarding the handling of personal data).
- Relevant guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) regarding school meals and funding.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Headteacher:** Overall responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of this policy.
- **School Business Manager/Receptionist:** Responsible for managing dinner money accounts, monitoring debt levels, and communicating with parents regarding outstanding balances.
- **Class Teachers/Teaching Assistants:** To be aware of the policy and to support pupils in accessing school meals.
- **Parents/Guardians:** Responsible for ensuring that dinner money accounts are kept in credit or for applying for free school meals if eligible.

4. Policy Implementation

4.1. Payment Procedures

- School meals cost £2.70 per meal (September 2025-July 2026)
- Payment is preferred via ParentPay.
- Cash payments will be accepted in exceptional circumstances and should be handed to the school office.
- Parents are encouraged to set up automated payments to ensure sufficient funds are available.
- Accounts should be kept in credit to ensure Pupils can receive a meal.
- Parents will receive regular reminders to top up their accounts.

4.2. Managing Dinner Money Debt

Stage 1

Indicator: A child's account goes into debt

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
- Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3 does this parent normally pay on time, is this just a one off?

Action 1: send a 'Gentle debt reminder' Appendix B

Stage 2

Indicator: A child comes to school again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
- Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3 has this parent made contact?
- Discuss with DSL about the situation

Action 2: Personal contact

Someone will phone the parent to ask them to either bring money or pay online or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime. If no lunch is brought into school the child will be provided with a jam sandwich and have a piece of fruit.

Stage 3

Indicator: The parent does not comply with any of these options,

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
- Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3 has this parent made contact?
- Discuss with DSL about the situation

Action 3: send strong debt letter Appendix B

Stage 4

Indicator: The parent consistently does not comply with any of these options,

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
- Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3 has this parent made contact?
- Discuss with DSL about the situation

Action 4: bring in outside agencies

School to refer to Children's Social Care who will initiate further action

- **Support and Intervention:**
 - The school will proactively offer support to families experiencing financial difficulties, including:
 - Providing information about free school meal eligibility and assisting with the application process.
 - Signposting to local support services and charities that can provide financial assistance.
 - Arranging a payment plan to clear the debt over a reasonable period.
- **Alternative Meal Provision:**
 - In cases of persistent debt where no payment arrangement has been made and support has been declined, the school reserves the right to provide an alternative, basic meal (e.g., a sandwich and fruit) instead of a hot school meal. Parents will be informed in advance of this action via phone or email.
 - This will not apply to pupils who are eligible for free school meals.
- **Debt Recovery:**
 - As a last resort, the school may consider debt recovery procedures, in line with local authority guidelines. This will only be pursued after all other avenues have been exhausted and with the full knowledge of the governing body.
 - The school will follow all legal guidelines in relation to debt recovery.

4.3. Free School Meals

- The school actively promotes free school meal eligibility and encourages parents/guardians to apply if they meet the criteria.
- Applications for free school meals can be made via <https://www.peterborough.gov.uk/residents/schools-and-education/free-school-meals> or you can collect a paper copy from the school office.
- The school will treat all applications for free school meals with confidentiality and sensitivity.
- Pupils eligible for free school meals will be treated the same as paying pupils.

4.4. Confidentiality

- All matters relating to dinner money debt and free school meal eligibility will be treated with strict confidentiality.
- Information will only be shared with relevant staff on a need-to-know basis.

5. Communication

- This policy will be made available to all parents/guardians on the school website.
- Regular reminders about dinner money payments will be sent via email.
- Parents/guardians are encouraged to contact the school office with any questions or concerns regarding dinner money.

This policy will be applied with due regard to the Equality Act 2010 and the school's commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion. Reasonable adjustments will be made for families and pupils with particular needs.

7. Monitoring and Review

- The School Business Manager/Receptionist will monitor dinner money debt levels on a regular basis.
- This policy will be reviewed annually by the Headteacher and School Business Manager, in consultation with the governing body.
- The review will consider the effectiveness of the policy in managing debt, supporting families, and ensuring that all pupils have access to a nutritious meal.
- Any necessary amendments will be made to the policy to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

8. Appendices

- Appendix A: [Free School Meal Application Form](#)
- Appendix B: Sample Letter Regarding Dinner Money Debt

Dear

Pupil: Class:

I am writing to remind you that according to our records, you have arrears on your child's dinner money account.

Our records show that for your child Class: at your debt is

Please arrange for this to be paid immediately by using ParentPay, our secure online payment system. You can use the login previously provided. Please visit www.parentpay.com

Your username and password are:

User Name Password

You can check your account balance at anytime by logging into your ParentPay account.

Non-payment for school meals affects the quality of service we are able to offer to the children therefore we need to ensure that all accounts are up-to-date. Once the debt is cleared please ensure the account remains in credit.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or if you have difficulty making payment please contact the school office to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely