

School Meals Debt Policy 2024

Approved by	
Name:	Mr J Newport
Position	Headteacher
Signed:	J Newport
Date:	March 2024
Review Date	March 2025

	Rationale
101	Marden Bridge Middle 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.
102	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.
103	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
201	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 School Comms Individual login details will be provided to parents/carers as soon as their child starts at Marden Bridge Middle School.
202	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.
203	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
301	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 £2.60. This will enable students to purchase a hot or cold meal deal at lunchtime. Students

	<p>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 'roll over' and accumulate until the end of that school week. Each Monday a fresh zero balance is set.</p>
302	<p>If parents/carers believe that their child may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals they should contact North Tyneside Council for more details. Further details are available on the school website at - mbms.org.uk</p> <p>Parents/carers requiring support in making an application should contact the school Finance Office who will be pleased to provide assistance.</p> <p>This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify.</p>
	<p>ParentPay Account - Debt Management</p>
401	<p>To assist parents/carers in the management of their child's school meal accounts, reminders can be set on the ParentPay system to alert them when balances are running low. Parents/carers are strongly encouraged to utilise this facility.</p> <p>Each day, the school will send out a reminder by email to parents/carers where any sum of money, regardless of amount, is owing on the account.</p> <p>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.</p>
	<p>Stages to collecting debt payments</p>
402	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Daily text sent to families when account falls into arrears ● Next day pupils can still claim a meal (if no money has been paid) This will be a sandwich only. Text is once again sent if the account is in arrears. There will also be a phone call directly made to parents ● Point 2 continues and the debt reaches £10.00, sandwiches cease and parents must send their child to school with a packed lunch. A parental meeting will be set up by the school. The school is committed to working with parents to find a solution. If the school feels the parent is not making adequate effort.
403	<p>Where the debt continues to remain unpaid and the balance reaches £10 or more, the following letters will be sent out by post to the parents/carers registered</p>

	address as well as to email addresses on the school system. See Appendix 1 and 2.
404	Where balances are in excess of £10 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.
403	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.
404	<p>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.</p> <p>We have set the parameters in this policy as the school budget cannot subsidise family school meal debt, that is not what school educational funds are for.</p>

Appendix 1

Letter for Non-Free School Meal Students

Parents Address

RE: School meal balance owing as at (insert date)

Students Name - Amount owing

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 the debt is cleared, we must notify you that with effect from AAAAAAA 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 finding it difficult 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 the school on the number below and we will help you with the application.

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 a debt collection agency.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter, if you wish to discuss this 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 (insert date)

Student Name - amount owing

Dear Parent Name

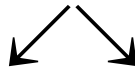
Further to several recent communications, our records indicate that you still have significant arrears on your child's school meal account. Unfortunately, until the debt is cleared we must notify you that with immediate effect it will be necessary to limit your child to a hot or cold meal deal at lunchtime in line with their Free School Meal allowance of £2.60 to 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 £2.60 should be paid for in advance and therefore your account should always be in credit.

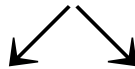
Thank you for your assistance in this matter, if you wish to discuss this further do not hesitate to get in touch.

Appendix 3 - Debt Management Flowchart

Debt on school meal account - Reminder sent daily Debt Cleared



Yes	No
<p>No further action</p> <p>Student accesses service as normal.</p>	<p>Two further daily reminders sent.</p> <p>Parents are expected to send food to school.</p> <p>No food sent - call made to parents/carers.</p> <p>The student has no access to food in school - lunch only is provided. No snacks or drinks</p> <p>Payment made?</p>



Yes	No
<p>No further action</p> <p>Student accesses the service as normal.</p>	<p>Debt reaches £10.00 - Letter sent by post to registered address and email.</p> <p>Access to catering facility removed.</p> <p>Parents/Carers must provide healthy, nutritious food for student to access during the school day - lunch and any snacks required.</p> <p>Where food is not provided consider treating the matter as a safeguarding concern</p>

