



# Adelaide Primary School Dinner Money Debt Policy

## September 2020

### ETHOS AND VALUES

Adelaide Primary School is an exciting inner-city school that provides a first class educational experience to its children. We aim to ensure all our children are safe, enjoy coming to school, achieve highly and are very well prepared for life in modern Britain. To achieve this, all members of the Adelaide school community are expected to take responsibility and make a valuable contribution. Our core values of respect, equality and effort underpin all aspects of our work.

School policies are reviewed to include racial equality, accessibility, inclusion and equal opportunities for all.

What IMPACT does the policy have on the lives of pupils at Adelaide Primary School with regards to the above statement?

The Governing Body of Adelaide Primary School recognises the valuable contribution that the wide range of additional activities, including clubs, trips and residential experiences can make towards pupils' personal and social education. They are particularly keen to support the Headteacher and the staff in giving as many first hand experiences to the children at the school so that their education be rooted in real life learning experiences.

This policy has been compiled recognising the difficulties placed on school in balancing the social welfare of pupils with the responsibility of managing the School Budget.

### **Background**

At Adelaide Primary School the School Dinner Money Debt Policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners. Money owed affects the school overall budget and must be settled promptly.

The school budget has to directly fund any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered through the Local Authority, thereby directly affecting the amount of money that is available to provide education to all pupils.

### **Provision of School Meals**

The Schools Meals Service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for by someone. Free School Meals are available for parents who meet certain criteria including the receipt of state benefits. Anyone who may qualify for Free School Meals should contact the school office for further information.

Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that all parents/carers who qualify take up their child's entitlement so that they can receive a School meal each day. The office staff will assist any parent in completing an application form for free school meals.

If a child's entitlement to free school meals expires or the parents/ carers personal circumstances change the parent/carer must provide a packed lunch or send payment in advance for a school dinner.

If children are absent their dinner money is credited for the following week.

If a child forgets their packed lunch and is given a school meal, parents must pay for the meal on the same day or the following morning at the latest (except for children of Free School Meals).

## **Cost of School Meals**

School meals are available to children at a cost of £1.50 per day or at no cost to those in receipt of Free School Meals entitlement or Reception (FS2) and Key Stage One children who have an entitlement to free school meals due to government legislation. School meals must be paid for in advance. Any revision to the school meal prices will be notified to parents/carers the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

## **Payment for School Meals**

Payments for School Meals are to be put in a sealed envelope with the child's name on and the money inside for the week, the child will then hand the envelope over to the class teacher when they arrive into school. The money will then be sent down to the office to be counted. The School must ensure that all dinner money collected is banked in a timely manner in accordance with the School's Financial Regulations which are periodically inspected by audit.

## **Management of School Meal Debts**

To ensure that the School's budget is not adversely affected by the cost of School meal debt, the Governors agree that the fairest system to all families is to pursue a 'Zero Tolerance' approach. Although, this may seem overly strict to some parents, it is important that the school budget is spent for the benefit of all our pupils and not a small number of pupils.

When a child has failed to produce dinner money, the school may allow a meal to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary situation. e.g. lost or forgotten dinner money, temporary hardship etc. However, details should be recorded in writing and a record maintained and monitored.

If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a letter detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting payment directly to the school within 7 days. The same process will be used if a cheque is not honoured by the bank. Prompt action will be taken to address any debt issue at an early stage in order to prevent arrears amassing.

Where a child continues to require meals, the School should establish if the child is entitled to free school meals, or if the parent/carer is experiencing hardship which affects their ability to pay. Under these circumstances, the parent/carer should be invited to apply for free school meals or speak confidentially to the Head Teacher or Emotional Well-being Officer.

If the outstanding debt remains unpaid, the Governing Body will take action to recover this. A final letter will be sent to the parents informing them that the school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to secure payment. Parents must also be aware that further school meals for their children will need to pay at least a month in advance. In rare cases in which payment is not made, the School reserve the right to cease to provide the service of school meals where debts are recurring over a sustained period of time. In this instance, parents should provide a packed lunch or collect their child at lunchtime. These circumstances must be authorised by the Head of School prior to school meals being ceased.

Social services may be informed that parents are not carrying out their legal responsibility of care by not providing food for their child at lunchtime.

**If the debt exceeds £5**, a text will be sent to the parent to remind them to make payment.

**If the debt exceeds £7.50**, a phone call home will be made to request that the parent make payment.

**When the debt exceeds £10** for a child or family, a formal letter must be sent to the parent/carer informing them to provide their child/children with a packed lunch to prevent further arrears.

**If the debt exceeds £30** for a family and/or action proves unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, the School should inform the local Safeguarding Team and formally write to the parent/carer, explaining that the School is not obliged to provide a school dinner where advance payment is not forthcoming or where authorisation for free school dinners has not been received (Example letter 2). This action must first be authorised by the Head of School.

### **Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts**

At each meeting of the Governing Body/Finance Committee, the Head Teacher will provide Governors with details of any outstanding dinner money debt and the current position with regard to such debt. The aim of the School's Dinner Money Debt policy is to minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up and incurring costly referral to the School's solicitors or Local Authority. The School does, however, reserve the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal debts and inform the local authority that a child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

All Write-offs of outstanding debt must be approved by the Governing Body/Finance Committee following submission of details of the debt by the Head Teacher or Head of School together with reasons for no further action being taken.

Confirmation that the Dinner Money Debt Policy in respect of Adelaide Primary School has been agreed by the Governing Body

Agreed at the Governors Policy Review Meeting on:

Review Date: September 2021

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

(Address Line 1)

(Address Line 2)

(Address Line 3)

(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)

According to the School's financial records you have not paid dinner money for your child. As at xx/xx/xx your account is showing a debt of £xx.

In order that the school's budget is not used to clear your child's debt please make arrangements for the outstanding dinner money debt to be paid immediately. Once you have cleared the current debt I should be grateful if you could ensure that you keep your account in credit. The current cost of a school meal is £1 per day or £5.00 per week.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information. Remember that Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify, your child will then receive a school meal each day.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or wish to discuss the matter further please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

Yours sincerely

Head of School

Example – Letter 2

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

(Address Line 1)

(Address Line 2)

(Address Line 3)

(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

School Meals provided to (Pupil Name/s)

I am writing regarding the current level of outstanding school meal debt that is showing on your account. Despite previous correspondences and messages the debt for your child/ren is still outstanding. The School's records show that as at xx/xx/xx your account is £x in debt. The current cost of a school meal is £1 per day or £5.00 per week.

I would ask that you please make arrangements to clear this debt immediately and take steps to ensure your account is kept in credit in the future.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information. Remember that Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify, your child will then receive a school meal each day.

Since the School has to fund all school meal debts from its budget it is essential that all payments are up to date so that the quality of the service provided to all pupils is maintained. Unfortunately, if the debt is not cleared by xxxxx a school meal will no longer be provided to your child and you must make your own arrangements for your child's lunch.

The school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the outstanding debt and to inform the local authority and or social services that your child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely

Head of School