Lunch Account Finger Number (LAFN) - Frequently Asked Questions

What is LAFN authentication?
LAFN identification is simply one way of quickly and uniquely recognising users in a way that cannot be forgotten or lost. It only needs the user to register once for all systems across the entire school for which parental permission has been given. LAFN authentication is a type of system that relies on the unique biological characteristics (in this case a finger image) of individuals to verify identity for secure access to electronic systems. By measuring an individual's physical features in an authentication inquiry and comparing this data with stored reference data, the identity of a specific user is determined.

How does it work?
By taking an image of your child's finger we can turn this information into a digital signature that can then be recognised by our systems. When the student places their finger on the scanner, the software matches their image with the unique digital signature held in the database. Students will then be able to purchase food and check account balances by simply placing a finger on a digital scanner.

What does the law that relates to school say about information held?
Although it is not strictly the same thing, this is covered by the section of the Data Protection Act relating to biometric data. The Information Commissioner considers all biometric information to be personal data as defined by the Data Protection Act 1998; this means that it must be obtained, used and stored in accordance with that act. The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 changed the way that schools are allowed to use biometric data in schools and colleges when used as part of an automated biometric recognition system. (See the link at the end of this document for Government Guidance on biometrics in Schools).

Can the finger scans be used by any other agency?
No, the software we use turns your child's finger image into a mathematical algorithm. The image of the finger is then discarded. The information that is stored cannot be used to recreate an image of the child's biometric.

What happens when a student leaves the School?
When a student leaves school all data relating to their finger image will be permanently deleted.

What happens to the finger image?
When a pupil registers to the system, their finger is placed on to a finger scanner. The finger image is then converted into a collection of data points via a mathematical algorithm. This data is then encrypted and stored on the pupil's account to be used as their unique identifier.

Are the finger images stored?
No. The finger image is only used to generate a collection of data points which is then encrypted. The finger reader looks for specific patterns and unique identifiers on the finger, assigning specific data to each point - a fingerprint is never actually recorded.

Can the secure data be reversed to produce a fingerprint?
No. The data points produced by the algorithm cannot be reversed to produce a full fingerprint. The data is fully encrypted to military grade standards and even if this was to be broken, trying to reproduce a fingerprint from the data points could never produce anything usable.

Is my child's data secure?
Our database is stored within the school on a secure server system. The database is fully password protected and cannot be accessed by the copying of the physical data files. The data itself is encrypted within this database. For more information on data protection in school our Data Protection Policy is available on request from the school.

Can the police use the data as a fingerprint?
Our solutions only store encrypted data points from a finger scan. Even if we were asked to decrypt and reverse the algorithm for the police, it would not produce the image of a fingerprint.

I have identical twins, won't they have the same finger image?
Identical twins share many physical similarities but will have different finger images, so there would not be any mistakes made when the system identifies them.

What about cuts, or other injuries?
Unless the injury resulted in a severe disfigurement to the finger, then the system will have no problem identifying the user. Alternatively, an alternate finger can be registered for identification.

What if my child has a medical condition that makes her finger image difficult to read?
A PIN code can be issued or there is an option to look up a student via surname for any student who cannot use the scanner or the PIN code reader. This will be available from any till in the school.

What about hygiene when everyone is touching the same area with their fingers and then eating?
Antibacterial gel will be available at the entrances to the canteen and students/staff are encouraged to use them. The scanners will be part of a daily cleaning rota and will be regularly sanitised.

I have scanners in my workplace and sometimes they don't recognise my finger. Will students go hungry if this happens to them?
There is an option to look up a student or staff member via surname or a PIN code can be issued. We can also scan a different finger if necessary. This will be available from the canteen at any time so no student will ever go hungry.

What if the system breaks down?
All cabling will be installed by professionals and in accordance with Health and Safety regulations. The cashless company has clear Service Level Agreements in place which means a quick turnaround for failed hardware and on-line support for software issues.

I do not want my child to be entered into the LAFN database, what alternatives are there?
Any pupil who wishes to opt out of our LAFN database will be issued with a 5 digit PIN number.

I am happy for my child to be on the LAFN database but what if he/she does not want this to happen?
Although it is not strictly the same thing, the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 has legislated that if a pupil under 18 objects or refuses to participate (or to continue to participate) in activities that involve the processing of their biometric data, the school must ensure that the pupil's biometric data are not taken/used as part of a biometric recognition system. A pupil's objection or refusal overrides any parental consent to the processing. In a case like this, we would issue a 5 digit PIN number.

What are the benefits of a LAFN system
- No lost cards
- Fewer delays through tills due to pupils forgetting cards
- No stolen or lent cards
- Not additional charges to parents or students for lost/damaged cards

Useful links
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1092507/Biometrics_Guidance_July_2022.pdf