



Lionel Walden Primary School

School Meal Provisions and Debt Management Policy

Date policy last reviewed: December 2024

Signed by:

S Abey Headteacher Date: 3/12/24

J Dale Chair of governors Date: 3/12/24

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Statement of intent

Lionel Walden Primary School is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all pupils, regardless of financial circumstances, and has established the following policy and procedures to ensure that no child is discriminated against.

The governing board is responsible for ensuring that school meal provisions are accessible to all pupils and that procedures are in place for the recovery of any outstanding debt.

This policy has been adopted to ensure that there is a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents whose children eat school meals. The responsibility falls on the school to pursue instances of non-payment.

The school budget will be directly affected by any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered, thereby directly affecting all pupils in school. We are confident that every parent will agree that this is unacceptable, and we encourage that all parents give this policy their full support.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- The Education Act 1996
- The Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014
- DfE (2018) 'Charging for school activities'
- DfE (2020) 'Governance handbook'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Complaints Procedures Policy
- Debt Recovery Policy
- Charging and Remissions Policy
- Whole-school Food Policy

2. Charging for school meals

School meals are available to pupils at a cost of **£2.50** or at no cost to those in receipt of FSM entitlement. Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 are entitled to Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM).

Payments will be expected from parents for school meals **in advance of the meals being required**. Payments can be made weekly, fortnightly, monthly or when the account nears zero. Payment can be made using our online payment system or cash.

In exceptional circumstances, and with the authorisation of the headteacher, meals will be provided to ensure children do not go hungry. This debt must be cleared in line with point 4 of this policy – Management of school meal debt.

Where parents make payments in cash, they will deposit the money to the school office, in a sealed envelope or bag with the pupil's name, class, the amount of money enclosed and the number of meals being paid for.

Where a pupil's meal has been paid for in advance and they are absent on the day of the meal, the amount paid will be held on the account and credited towards a future meal unless a request for a refund is made.

3. Free school meals (FSM)

There is a statutory right to FSM for families who meet certain criteria. It is important that all parents who qualify take up their entitlement so that their child can receive a school meal each day.

Parents who receive one or more of the following support payments could be entitled to receive FSM (assuming the parent does not receive working tax credit):

- Universal Credit
- Income support
- Income-based jobseeker's allowance
- Income-related employment and support allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guaranteed element of pension credit
- Child tax credit (provided they are not also entitled to working tax credit and have an annual gross income of no more than the current threshold)
- Working tax credit run-on – paid for four weeks after they stop qualifying for working tax credit

A pupil will only be eligible to receive FSM when a claim for FSM has been made on their behalf and their eligibility has been verified by the school. Parents will take responsibility for ensuring that they have claimed FSM for their child and will be aware that the entitlement to FSM cannot be backdated.

The school will check the eligibility of all applicants for FSM, working with the LA wherever necessary, and will record the date on which they receive the initial application for FSM from a parent and the date on which eligibility is verified. Eligibility checks are carried out promptly to ensure that the most accurate and up-to-date information is being used.

4. Management of school meal debts

Where there is an outstanding payment yet to be received, the following steps will be initiated to clear the debt:

- **Notification from School Gateway** – if accounts fall into arrears, a daily notification from School Gateway will be sent to the account holder indicating the outstanding debt. The account holder should make payments immediately to clear this debt.
- **Email reminder** - at the end of the week, accounts in debt by £12.50 or more will receive a school email indicating the monies owed. The account holder should make payments immediately to clear this debt.
- **First formal written reminder** – if the debt is not cleared, the school will send an official, dated letter addressed to the parent acknowledging that the informal reminder took place and that payment of the debt is required.
- **Second formal written reminder** – the school will send a second formal reminder, citing the details of previous reminders and stating that concerted efforts have been made to make the parent aware that an outstanding debt is overdue.

Where the parent does not respond to the above reminders, the school will send a follow-up letter to the parent advising them that the case has been referred to the school's legal advisors and governing board.

The school will work with the parent to establish, and agree on, a timeframe for a repayment or, if necessary, a payment plan for separate instalments.

The school will inform parents that debts should be repaid as soon as possible, particularly after repeated reminders; however, delayed payments can be negotiated in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the head teacher or governing board.

If there is a case where the parent is deemed to be refusing to pay without sufficient reason, the school will consider involving the LA's legal services to resolve the issue and recuperate owed funds.

The school reserves the right to withdraw or adapt access to school meal provision should debts be deemed too high or no attempt at repaying the debt is made. In the interest of all parties, the school will work with parents to ensure the situation is resolved quickly.

The school will ensure that a written record is kept of the date and time all reminders are sent and any responses to those reminders, including informal reminders.

5. Exceptional circumstances and remissions

The school will ensure that parents of pupils are aware of the help the school can extend to those in financial difficulty. Parents who may be eligible for remissions will be considered to be those in receipt of any of the benefits outlined in section 3 of this policy.

Where the school expects that a parent with an overdue debt may qualify for remissions, the school will contact them with details of the different types of bursaries available.

The governing board will consider, on a case-by-case basis, whether to waive or reduce the outstanding debt in these circumstances.

6. Monitoring and review

This policy is reviewed annually by the governing board and headteacher. The next scheduled review date for this policy is 16th October 2025

Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all parents and relevant stakeholders.