



SCHOOL MEAL PROVISION & DEBT MANAGEMENT POLICY

Policy Statement

The Governing Body is responsible for ensuring that school meals provisions are accessible to all children and that procedures are in place for the recovery of any outstanding debt.

As from 24 April 2017 Abbey Woods Academy has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy to the school meal service.

The School Meals and Debt Recovery Policy has been adopted to ensure that there is a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose child/ren take school dinners. The responsibility now 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 children in school. We are confident that every parent will agree that this is unacceptable and we request that all parents give this policy their full support.

Aims

- To outline the school's procedures regarding school meals
- To ensure the smooth, efficient and cost effective operation of the school dinner system
- To clarify the roles and responsibilities of school staff, parents and pupils
- To present a workable, fair mechanism for the collection of school dinner money.
- To work with parents to provide a flexible approach to the lunchtime nutritional needs of our pupils
- To minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up.

Charging of School Meals

School meals are available to pupils at a cost of £2.10 per day or at no cost to those in receipt of a free meal entitlement, see free school meals details below.

Meals can be requested daily at morning registry. There may be a few exceptions when the school will require advance notice of your child's requirements for events like the school Christmas dinner and sports day picnic.

Universal infant free school meals – Foundation Stage and KS1 children only

All pupils in reception, year 1 and year 2 in state-funded schools in England are entitled to receive a free school lunch, through the introduction of the government's universal infant free school meals (UIFSM) policy.

Free School Meals

There is a statutory right to the Free School Meals system for families who meet certain criteria. It is important that all parents/carers who qualify take up their entitlement so that their child/ren can receive a school meal each day.

Parents/carers who receive one or more of the following support payments are entitled to receive free school meals (assuming the parent does not receive Working Tax Credit).

- Income-based and contribution-based Jobseekers Allowance or ESA on an equal basis
- Income Support
- Income Based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related employment and support allowance
- Child Tax Credit, provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual income, as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, that does not exceed £16,190
- Guaranteed Element of State Pension Credit
- Where a parent is entitled to Working Tax Credit run-on (the payment someone receives for a further four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit).
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.
- Working Tax Credit, provided they have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190 per year (eligible for two Year Old Funding only)
- Universal Credit

Parents/carers can check if their child/ren is eligible to a free school meal by using the online Free School Meals software package (www.cloudforedu.org.uk/ofsm/sims). This service will make the process of registering much easier and discreet.

Parents/carers only need register their details once. The online service uses the details provided to continually check whether a child qualifies for free meals, informing both parents and the school of a change in eligibility. In circumstances where parents do not have access to the internet a form can be provided from the school office who will then make the online application on the parent/carers behalf.

Our intention is that **all families at Abbey Woods Academy should be registered** so that entitlement to free school meals are kept up to date, whether the parent/carer currently qualifies or not. The school understand only too well that family circumstances change unexpectedly and this new system can ensure that parents receive the extra help they need when required.

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 make payment via ParentPay in advance for a school dinner. The school will always be happy to meet with parents/carers to discuss their circumstances if this is required.

Paying for School Meals (this section currently refers to KS2 Pupils taking dinners)

The payment for meals is required in advance. Parents can make payment on a termly basis in advance if they wish.

The school operates a cashless system. School meals should be paid for via ParentPay using either a debit or credit card. There is also the facility to pay via PayPoint for those parents wanting to use the PayPoint method. PayPoint cards can be requested via the School Office. In exceptional circumstances cash payments can be made through the school office, but only if approved by the School Business Manager. Payment for school meals should be made in advance and parents should ensure that children keep to the specified number of days for which payment has been made.

If a child from KS2 arrives at school without a packed lunch and payment has not been received or if a child's entitlement to free school meals has ceased, the School will agree to provide the child with a meal in the first instance whilst trying to contact the parent/carer to establish what alternative arrangements can be put in place. If a parent forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance, however this debt must be paid for the

next day via ParentPay or PayPoint. If no contact is made with parents/carers before lunch time the school will provide the child with a school meal without the parent's consent and this meal will be chargeable.

If a child presents themselves for a school meal at lunch time and they have indicated at morning registry that they are taking a packed lunch the lunchtime supervisor will check if they have forgotten to collect their packed lunch box. If the child's lunch box cannot be found, then the child will be put forward for a school meal and a charge for KS2 children will be made for this meal.

It is the parent's responsibility to ensure that their child/ren has a clear understanding of the meal options they should choose for each given day.

Management and Monitoring of School Meal Debts

It is the parents/carers responsibility to track any debts occurring and payment should be made immediately. If there are any disputes over meals taken parents/carers must contact the school office.

If your child has taken a school meal which has not been paid for you will be sent via ParentPay a reminder letter (Appendix 1) detailing how much you owe and reminding parents of the schools NO DEBT policy. Payment must be made immediately. If payment is not received at the end of the following week a 2nd letter (Appendix 2) will be sent via ParentPay detailing monies owed and inform parents that if the debt is not cleared the matter will be referred to the School Business Manager (SBM). If payment is still not received 5 working days after the issue of the 2nd reminder the SBM will send a 3rd letter (Appendix 3) to parents detailing the consequences of non-payment and a final date by which payment must be made. If the matter remains unresolved, you will be invited (Appendix 4) to meet with the SBM to discuss the debt.

Where a child continues to take unpaid meals and a parent/carer is experiencing hardship which affects their ability to pay, the school will provide support to parents to establish if they are entitled to free school meals or arrange a meeting to speak confidentially to the School Business Manager.

The school cannot tolerate debt amounting to more than one week's payment, if debts are incurred then the school budget has to pay for them. If a parent repeatedly fails to provide a packed lunch, or sufficient monies to cover the cost of school meals, there may be a referral to Social Services as this has an effect on a pupil's welfare.

The school is not obliged to provide a school dinner where payment is not forthcoming or where authorisation for free school meals has not been received. We will therefore act promptly to address such issues at an early stage, in order to prevent arrears of dinner monies from accumulating to a point beyond parents means to settle.

The school will in exceptional circumstances postpone the refusal to provide meals where parents have advised the school of their financial situation and school is satisfied that the funding will be forthcoming.

The school will work closely with parents in working out a form of payment plan to help resolve the situation if requested by the parent. However, where no attempt is made to clear the debt it will follow the procedure of the school's Debt Management Policy.

Information regarding free school meals is available from the School website.

- Appendix 1 – 1st debt reminder letter
- Appendix 2 – 2nd debt reminder letter
- Appendix 3 – 3rd & final debt reminder letter from SBM
- Appendix 4 – invite to discuss debt at school with SBM

This policy has been agreed and adopted by the governing body:

Date: March 2017

Headteacher's signature: _____

Chair of Governor's signature: _____