Denby Free CoE VA Primary School

DINNER MONEY POLICY

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Statement of intent.

The Denby Free CoE VA Primary School Debt/Dinner Money Policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners.

The school budget directly funds any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered thereby directly affecting the amount of money that is available to provide a fit for purpose education to all pupils, and this what we will always strive to achieve.

1. Provision of school meals

1.1. The School's Meals Service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for by someone.

1.2. Free School Meals are available to all children who are in the school year Reception, Year 1 and Year 2. This is called Universal Free School Meals.

1.3. Families in Key Stage 2 who meet certain criteria including the receipt of state benefits, may also find that their children is entitled to Free School Meals. Anyone who feels that they 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 benefit from this.

Information on the entitlement to free school meals and an application form can be found on the Derbyshire County Council's website: https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your-child-at-school/meals/school-meals/free-school-meals.aspx

1.4. 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.

2. Cost of School Meals

School meals are available to children at a cost of £3.25 per day or at no cost to those in receipt of Free School Meals entitlement. School meals that are paid for **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.

3. Payment for School Meals

3.1. All school meals must be paid for using a ParentPay account. An activation code and password can be obtained from the school office.

4. Management of School Meal Debts

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

4.2. If a child arrives at school without a packed lunch, or if a child's entitlement to free school dinners has ceased, the school office will telephone/text the parent/carer in the first instance to establish if alternative arrangements have been made.

4.3. If payment for dinners has not been made prior to the meal being taken, the school office will telephone/text the parent/carer in the first instance to establish when payment will be made. The school may allow a meal to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary situation e.g. forgotten dinner money, internet issues, bank issues, temporary hardship etc. However, details should be recorded in writing and a record maintained and monitored.

4.4. If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a message detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting payment via ParentPay to the school. Prompt action will be taken to address any debt issue at an early stage to prevent arrears accumulating.

4.5. Where a child continues to require meals, but no payment is being made, the school must 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 Headteacher.

4.6. All debts will be chased initially by text/email letter on the Monday of the following week. If the debt is not paid by Wednesday, a member of the office team will text again to request payment of the debt. If the debt has not been paid by Friday a phone call will be made to the parent/carer. The parent/carer will be instructed to send sandwiches until the debt is cleared. If contact has been unsuccessful, a message will be sent advising of the outstanding amount and that sandwiches will need to be provided until the debt is cleared. If the child/children is/are not provided with the requested packed lunch and the parent/carer cannot be contacted, the school will provide a sandwich meal and a drink only but will still be charged for a cooked meal.

4.7. If the debt exceeds £25 per child and/or action proves unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, the school will 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. It will also be brought to the attention of the Designated Safeguarding Leads to alert them to parents not engaging with the school office.

5. Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts

5.1. At each Full Governor Meeting, the School Business Manager 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 policy is to minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up and incur costly referrals to the school's solicitors.

5.2. 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.

5.3. Where the dinner money debt is £25 or more and contact with parent/carer is unsuccessful, an invoice will be created and sent to the parent/carer. The Exchequer Team at County Hall will also be notified.

5.4. If payment has not been made by 21 days, a reminder will be sent from the Exchequer Team.

5.5. If payment has not been made by 35 days, a final notice will be sent by the Exchequer Team advising the parent/carer of the action which will be taken if payment is not received.

5.6. If, after 45 days, payment has still not been made, the Exchequer Team will contact school to discuss if a referral is to be made the Legal Team for debt collection.

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

6. Monitoring and review

This policy is to be reviewed every year by the Headteacher and School Business Manager.

Any changes made to this policy will be communicated to all staff.

The next scheduled review date for this policy is September 2024.

Signed, on behalf of Denby Free CoE VA Primary School:

Headteacher: _____ *Chair:* _____

Date: _____ *Date:* _____

Minute No:

Reviewed:

To be reviewed: