

# Redfield Edge Primary School



## School Meals Provisions and Debt Management Policy

<b>Date reviewed</b>	January 2024	<b>Next review</b>	January 2025
<b>Policy type</b>	Non-statutory	<b>Review frequency</b>	Annual
<b>Responsibility</b>	Full Governing Body		
<b>Date approved by Committee: Not applicable</b>			
<b>Signed</b> (Chair of FGB)	<b>Name</b> (Chair of FGB) David Taylor	<b>Signed</b> (Head Teacher) <i>L Robinson</i>	<b>Name</b> (Head Teacher) Lisa Robinson
<b>Ratified by FGB on</b>	<b>Signed</b> (Chair of Governors) <i>D Taylor</i>	<b>Name</b> (Chair of Governor) David Taylor	

# Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Part 1: EIA Screening

<b>Policies, Procedures or Practices</b>		<b>Date</b>	15.1.24
<b>EIA CARRIED OUT BY:</b>	CWalker	<b>EIA APPROVED BY:</b>	

Groups that may be affected:

Are there any concerns that the policy could have a different impact on any of the following groups? (please tick the relevant boxes)	Existing or potential adverse impact	Existing or potential for positive impact
Age (young people, the elderly: issues surrounding protection and welfare, recruitment, training, pay, promotion)		X
Disability (physical and mental disability, learning difficulties; issues surrounding access to buildings, curriculum and communication).		X
Gender Reassignment (transsexual)		X
Marriage and civil partnership		X
Pregnancy and maternity		X
Racial Groups (consider: language, culture, ethnicity including gypsy/traveller groups and asylum seekers)		X
Religion or belief (practices of worship, religious or cultural observance, including non-belief)		X
Gender (male, female)		X
Sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, bisexual; actual or perceived)		X

Any adverse impacts are explored in a Full Impact Assessment.

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## **Statement of intent**

Redfield Edge Primary 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.

If debts are incurred, then the school budget has to pay for them. This means that money which should be spent on the children's education is used to pay for debts incurred.

It should be noted also that is very time consuming for the office staff to chase for dinner money – by letter, text or phone call. It can be embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative affect on the relationship between school and families. School staff are better used supporting the development and wellbeing of pupils.

We request that all parents/carers and staff give this policy their full support as it directly impacts how we are able to spend.

We will ensure that parents are aware of this policy by:

- Regular reminders in our newsletter
- It is accessible on the school website

## **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
- Charging and Remissions Policy

## **2. Charging for school meals**

Parents/carers must book in advance for school meals (please check school website for current prices) via the ParentMail online payment system. This is a cashless system, payments can be made at anytime via the ParentMail system.

## **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.

The Free School Meal (FSM) system is available for parents who are in receipt of specific state benefits. If a parent thinks they may qualify for FSM entitlement, they should visit South Gloucestershire Council website Free School Meals - <http://www.southglos.gov.uk/advice-and-benefits/benefits/free-school-meals> or check on our school website. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that parents use it if they qualify.

Parents will need to book their child's meal on ParentMail upto the night before, but will not be charged.

A pupil is only eligible to receive FSM when a claim for FSM has been made on their behalf and their eligibility has been verified by the school.

The responsibility for checking the eligibility of applicants for FSM rests with the school; however, the school may choose to work with the LA to carry out these checks via their eligibility checking system.

The school and LA, where appropriate, should record the date on which they receive the initial application for FSM from a parent. Eligibility checks are carried out promptly to ensure that the most accurate and up-to-date information is being utilised.

## **4. Universal Free School Meals (UFSM)**

Children in EYFS, Year 1 and Year 2 currently receive a free school meal as part of a government initiative, this is known as Universal Free School Meals and differs from the benefits related scheme as mentioned above.

Parents will need to book their child's meal on ParentMail upto the night before, but will not be charged.

## 5. Management of school meal debts

5.1 The ParentMail booking system allows for up to £2.40 debt per child before stopping any further bookings. Low balance prompts are texted and emailed to parents to ensure dinners are paid for in advance. Where the debt threshold is reached the system will not allow further bookings to be made until the debt is cleared.

5.2 Automatic debt reminder texts are regularly sent out to parents. This system means that substantial debts are not accumulated for dinner arrears.

### 5.3 Non-presentation of packed lunch/ no dinner booking

Where a pupil comes to school without provision for lunch the school office will contact the pupil's parents to request a packed lunch be brought in or confirmation of dinner booking. If a school dinner is required the school office will book it and charge the parent's ParentMail account.

### 5.4 Accounts in debt

When the £2.40 debt threshold is reached for this pupils' dinners the school office will

- Call the Parent and request a packed lunch before lunchtime or if not possible request the parent pay into the dinner money account to clear the debt. Once cleared the dinner can be booked.
- If the debt is not cleared and no packed lunch provided the school will follow the debt management steps outlined below: -

### 5.5 Steps of management of debt

At each stage of escalation, the following checks must be made:

Check 1: Is the child FSM, are the dates correct?

Check 2: Is there a possibility that payments have not been credited to our school account?

Check 3: Has the person/parent made contact to discuss or disclose extenuating circumstances?

1. **Initial verbal reminder** – informal telephone call notifying the person of debt, the call will be followed up with an informal email via ParentMail from the School Office.

Pupil will receive a school dinner up to two occasions (debt will increase no more than £5)

2. **First formal written reminder** – an official, dated letter addressed to the debtor is written up two weeks after the first informal reminder and acknowledges that it took place.

Pupil will be provided with a basic meal of a sandwich, fruit and water to ensure their wellbeing, but we would hope that all families would want their child to have a lunch.

3. **Second formal written reminder** – this is sent two weeks after the second reminder, citing the details of both previous reminders and stating that concerted efforts have been made to make the person aware that an outstanding debt is overdue.

If these reminders are not responded to, another letter is sent to the debtor advising them that the case has been referred to the school's legal advisors and governing board. These parties agree on a timeframe for a repayment or, if necessary, a payment plan for separate instalments.

#### **5.6 Consequences of Non Payment for School Meals**

If payment of the debt is not received, the school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the debt. Social Services may also be informed that these parents/carers are not carrying out the responsibility of care by not providing food for their child at lunchtimes. It is not the responsibility of the school to provide lunch for pupils, it is the responsibility of the parent/carer to provide a meal, either a school lunch or a packed lunch.

### **6. Exceptional circumstances and remissions**

The school ensures 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 are those in receipt of any of the benefits outlined in section 3 of this policy.

The governing board is not guaranteed, but may decide, to waive or reduce the outstanding debt in these circumstances.

## Appendix A: Reminder letter

Address line one

Address line two

City/town

Postcode

Date

**Re: Reminder letter of payment for school meals**

Dear name of parent,

According to our records, it appears that there is an outstanding payment for school meals for your child as from today. The amount due for payment is **amount**. We would be grateful if you would kindly clear this outstanding balance straight away. The last payment shown on our system was made on **date**.

If the debt is not paid, the issue will be escalated to the governing board. Please pay by ParentMail, or, if you wish to pay by cheque, please make it payable to Redfield Edge Primary.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information. Additional information and an application form can be found on the South Glos website the <http://www.southglos.gov.uk/advice-and-benefits/benefits/free-school-meals>

If you have any queries or difficulties with the payment of this amount, please let us know immediately and we will endeavour to help. Feel free to contact the school office on 01454 867165.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,



## Appendix B: Final warning letter

Address line one

Address line two

City/town

Postcode

Date

**Re: Final warning letter for payment of school meals debt**

Dear name of parent,

We have written to you previously regarding your child's outstanding school meal fees and, according to our records, we still have not received any payment. The last payment shown on our system was made on date.

The amount due for payment is amount and, as per our School Meals Provisions and Debt Management Policy, unless we receive payment by date, your child will need to bring a packed lunch until the debt has been paid, via ParentMail or cheque or cash.

If the debt is not paid within this time, the issue will be escalated to the governing board.

If you have any queries or difficulties with the payment of this amount, please let us know and we will endeavour to help.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

## Appendix C: Outstanding debt payment plan letter

Address line one

Address line two

City/town

Postcode

Date

**RE: Outstanding debt payment plan**

Dear name of parent,

I am writing to you following our discussion with the governing board regarding your outstanding debts to the school. **[Outline here the details of the meeting you had with the parent and governing board to discuss the payment schedule. Note the date and time of the meeting, outline the conclusions that came from the meeting, and reflect the agreed payment schedule using the table – an example of phrasing can be seen below.]**

As discussed on date and time, you currently owe the school £ – a full breakdown of which can be found in the invoice issued to you on date, which is attached.

We appreciate that money pressures can be stressful and, as agreed in our previous communication with the governing board, we have outlined the agreed payment plan below.

### Payment plan

<b>Outstanding debt</b>	
<b>Schedule of payments</b>	
<b>Total number of payments agreed</b>	
<b>Instalment amount</b>	
<b>First payment date</b>	
<b>Second payment date</b>	
<b>Third payment date</b>	
<b>Fourth payment date</b>	
<b>Final payment date</b>	

Payment method	
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**[Outline below the next steps regarding debt recovery – an example of what should be included is outlined below.]**

Please note, any missed or late payments within this payment schedule will result in a final notice of payment. Once you have received the final notice, you will have **seven** days to pay the outstanding fee. If, after this time, no payment has been received, we will initiate formal legal proceedings.

If your financial situation changes and you are able to pay the remaining debts sooner than the schedule, you can contact the Headteacher to discuss whether payments will be accepted.

We understand that financial difficulties can place great strain on people. If you are currently experiencing financial difficulties and would like to speak to somebody for advice, you may find the following organisations helpful:

- Money Advice Service, available on 0800 138 7777 or at:  
<https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en>
- Citizens Advice, available on 0800 144 8848 or at:  
<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/contact-us/contact-us/>
- National Debtline, available on 0808 808 4000 or at:  
<https://www.nationaldebtline.org/contact-us/>

If you have any additional questions regarding your debt or payment plan with the school, you can contact the school office and we can discuss your options to avoid any issues with repayment.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation with the payment plan.

Yours sincerely,