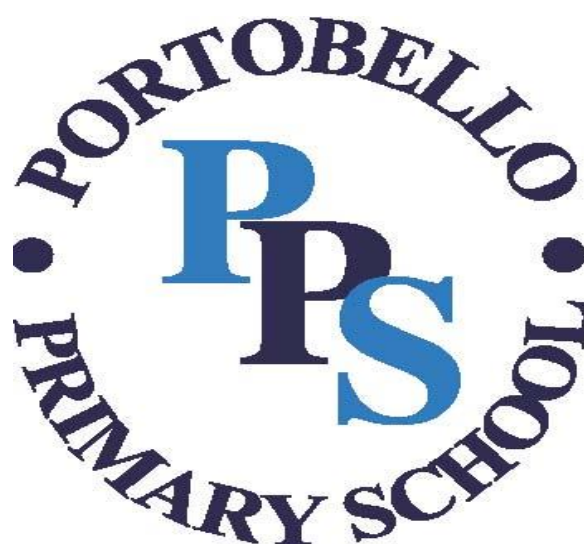


Portobello Primary School

Dinner Money Policy

2020



Ratified by Governors on: 25th September 2020
Signed: Jayne Humphrey

Portobello Primary School

Introduction

It is a parents' responsibility to ensure that a child is provided with a meal at school either a packed lunch or a school meal. Parents are responsible for ensuring school meals are paid for IN ADVANCE unless their child(ren) have a free school meal entitlement or in receipt of Universal Free School Meals (Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 pupils only).

The Local Authority and School has a responsibility to ensure that money is not owing for school meals. Gateshead Council cannot and will not permit any debts outstanding. Therefore, a policy is required to ensure school meal debts are kept to a minimum.

In writing this policy, the Governors of Portobello Primary School wish to implement one that ensures meals are paid for, whilst aiding Parents/Carers during financial difficulties and ensuring children still receive a meal at lunchtime.

Procedures are that School meals must be paid for in advance of meals being taken through SIMS Pay. Meals may be paid for on a weekly, half termly or termly basis.

If parents choose to pay either half termly or termly and a debt arises at the end of that period, it will be the parent's responsibility to provide the office with information as to where the error occurs.

Parents are responsible for providing a lunch for their child(ren), this may be in the form of a paid meal, application of a free meal entitlement or a packed lunch from home.

Portobello Primary School has a clear set of procedures for the payment and collection of school meal money and any arrears that occur.

- School meals should be paid for via SIMS Pay on a Monday morning to pay for school meals for that current week (or termly/annually in advance). Payments should be made using the online payment system. The school office can provide you with a username and password which you will need to set up your account.
- Reminders will be sent to parents who have not paid for school meals, by way of text on a weekly basis.
- If payment is not received a letter will be sent home to chase any outstanding payments.
- If payment remains outstanding a phone call will be made to the parent.
- Should arrears total over £50 (one month owing) then parents will be contacted and requested to provide packed lunches for their child(ren) until the debt is cleared.
- If a school dinner is expected when there are arrears, then parents will be contacted by the School Business Manager and a parent/carer will be expected to bring a packed lunch to school for that day.
- If payment remains outstanding with no attempts to clear the debt, a letter will be sent home to the parent offering the opportunity to clear the amounts according to a strict repayment schedule. If

the debt is not cleared within the agreed timeframe, the debt will be passed on to a Legal Services at Gateshead Council in order to recover the debt.

- If your child is absent from school and meals have been paid for, these will be carried forward as credits and the following weeks payments will be adjusted accordingly.
- If your child would like to change from having a school dinner, and alternatively bring a packed lunch to school, parents are required to give a minimum of one weeks' notice to the School Business Manager. Although in an emergency 24 hours will suffice.

Pupil Leaving School - as soon as school are notified that a child is leaving (or at the end of Year 6) the school office will check the balance of the child's account. Any debt outstanding must be paid in full, and any credit balance will be refunded via SIMS Pay.

Free School Meals - If you think that your child may be eligible to receive free school meals, please contact the Benefits Section at Gateshead Council.

You can apply online for free school meals on the basis of your income if you meet [the criteria below](#). If your application is successful, then school will be informed and will be awarded additional funding. This will secure extra funding for school and will mean that your child retains eligibility for free school meals for longer.

You and your partner must be in receipt of one of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Income Based Job Seekers Allowance (JSA - IB)
- Guarantee Pension Credit
- Income Related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA Income Related)
- Child Tax Credit - but not Working Tax Credit - and your income for Tax Credit purposes must be less than £16,190.00 (details are shown on your Tax Credit award notice)
- Working Tax Credit Run-on
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Universal Credit and your net earned family income is less than £7,400.

Receipt of one of the above benefits will be checked with the relevant government departments (HMRC, DWP and Home Office) and this may be done via the Eligibility Checking Service. By signing the declaration on the application form, you are giving your consent for us to check your eligibility through this service.

If you are eligible, your child will remain eligible until at least 31 March 2022. Once Universal Credit is fully rolled out, your child will then continue to receive a free school meal until the end of their current phase of education. Or when they leave school, whichever is the earliest.

If you are applying for free school meals because you receive support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 then you must phone us on 0191 433 4848, visit us at the Benefit Section, Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead, NE8 1HH or email benefitsfsm@gateshead.gov.uk

Application form can be found in the link below, alternatively contact the school office and one can be sent home with your child.

https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/media/13526/Application-form-for-means-tested-free-school-meals/doc/Benefits_FSMs_Application_Form.docx?m=636929163635730000

Debt procedures

In collecting any outstanding debts, a step-by-step process will be followed.

The time lapse between the steps will normally be 5 school days. However, this may vary depending on factors such as the time period within a term. The next step will be implemented if the debt has not been repaid or any contact made with the School.

Each week debts will be reviewed – you will be contacted via text initially in week 1 and then a “debt letter” will be sent either via eSchools email and/or via the child for all debts.

Letter 1 See Appendix A

This letter requests that the child is provided with a packed lunch until the debt is cleared. The School Office will ensure this is adhered to – if the child arrives at School without a packed lunch the parent/carers will be telephoned asking them to bring this into School immediately.

Letter 2: See Appendix B

For those debts which received “letter one” the previous week have not been cleared and still have debts, “debt letter two” will be sent via eSchools and Royal Mail, requesting that the parent/carers makes an appointment with the Head to discuss the outstanding debt.

Letter 3: See Appendix C

For those debts which received “letter two” the previous week have not been cleared and still have debts, the school will contact the parent by telephone to arrange an appointment. If this meeting is not kept or a satisfactory situation agreed, the debt will be referred to the Governing Body and “debt letter three” will be sent via eSchools and Royal Mail recorded delivery.

For debts, which received “letter three” the previous week the School Governors will need to decide on how to deal with this debt. If parents do not contact the school regarding the debt and no payment is paid, additional administration costs may be added to the debt. If this is necessary, the School Governors may seek to reclaim these costs and any outstanding debt through the Small Claims Court, Gateshead Council’s Legal Team will then be involved at this stage.

If parents fall into debt more than 3 times in a term the school reserves the right to refuse to provide meals for the rest of the term and the parent/carers will need to ensure a suitable packed lunch is provided daily.

If any monies are outstanding at the end of the academic year, the school reserve the right to charge an administration fee for time taken to recoup this outstanding debt, as well as claiming the money owed through the Small Claims Court.

We acknowledge that on occasion, families have financial difficulties and in these proven circumstances, the school will work hard with the family to agree a solution which is not to the detriment of the child.

Appendix A

Date:

Dear Parent/Carer

Re: School Dinner Payments for.....

Dinner Money Rate: Daily £2.50/Weekly £12.50

According to our records has been taking school meals recently. It appears that we have not received sufficient money to cover this cost. The outstanding balance as at..... was £.....

I would be grateful if payment could be paid by, via SIMS Pay including monies for the forthcoming week/half term/term if this is relevant.

It is the policy of Gateshead Council that the School does not pay for dinners on behalf of the children. I would be grateful if you could arrange for prompt payment of this outstanding debt.

Please ensure is provided with a packed lunch until this debt is cleared and school dinners can re-commence. Due to the ever-increasing debts owing for children's dinners, it is imperative that payment for meals is made promptly to the school, in advance of meals being taken.

Thank you for your assistance.

If you wish to discuss this further, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs J Humphrey

Head Teacher

Appendix B

Date:

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: School Dinners

You will recall that I wrote to you a few days ago regarding the outstanding balance on dinner money account. The balance as at is £.....

As you know, it is the policy of Gateshead Council that the School does not pay for dinners on behalf of the children.

I am disappointed that you have not paid the monies owing via SIMS Pay as requested in my previous letter and would request that you telephone the office to make an appointment to see me to discuss this further.

Thank you for your assistance.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely

Mrs J Humphrey

Head Teacher

Appendix C

Date:

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: School Dinners

I am disappointed you have been unable to contact me to make arrangements to recover the outstanding debt of £ In line with the school's Dinner Money Debt Policy and procedures, a copy of which is available on the school website.

I have no option but to refer this outstanding debt to the school Governors. The School Governors will consider the situation and will contact you in due course over the action they will take, should the outstanding debt not be recovered your account will be referred to Legal Services at Gateshead Council.

Yours sincerely

Mrs J Humphrey

Head Teacher