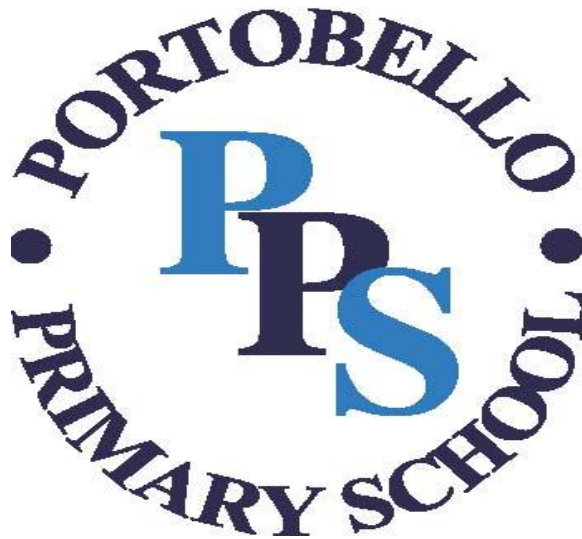


# Portobello Primary School

## Dinner Money Policy

2024



Ratified by Governors on: 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Parents/Carers 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 School Gateway 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 unique reference which you will need to set up your account, using your own email address and password for the address too.
- 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 £60 (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/carers 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/carer 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/carers are required to give a minimum of 24 hours' notice to the School Business Manager.

**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.

**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. [Free school meals - 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.

### **Who qualifies for free school meals**

Your child will qualify for free school meals if you meet all the following criteria:

you or your partner receive Child Benefit (for the child you are applying for)

the child is in full-time education, under 19 years of age

the child attends a local authority school or sixth form (but not a sixth-form college). If your child attends nursery, attendance must be full time and your child must attend before and after lunch in a nursery run by Gateshead Council

In addition, you and your partner must receive 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 (see section 'Families with no recourse to public funds' for information)

Universal Credit - with a net earned family income of less than £7,400

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

Families with no recourse to public funds

Families who may be eligible include (but are not limited to):

Zambrano carers

families with the right to remain in the UK under Article 8 of the ECHR

families receiving support under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

families receiving support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and subject to a NRPF condition

Chen carers

families holding a BNO passport

Spousal visa holders

Work visa holders

Student visa holders

families with no immigration status

To be eligible for free school meals, your family's annual household income must be no higher than the following:

£22,700 for families outside of London with one child

£26,300 for families outside of London with two or more children

This includes any wider income or support you may be receiving in addition to any earnings from employment.

You must also have less than £16,000 in savings, including any shares, investments and bank accounts, but not including your home.

If you think you fall into any of these groups, do not complete the application form. Instead, call 0191 433 3729 or email [benefitsFSM@gateshead.gov.uk](mailto:benefitsFSM@gateshead.gov.uk) with the heading 'NRPF free school meals' in the subject field. Provide your contact details so we can get in touch with you.

### **Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM)**

If you hit the criteria above don't wait until the end of year 2 to apply for free school meals, please apply now and you can help us receive funding!

The government has made provisions so that every child who attends school in key stage 1 (reception, year 1 and year 2) will be given a school meal regardless of their circumstances. However, when your child starts in year 3 you will need to apply for the means-tested scheme as

detailed above in the 'Who qualifies for free school meals' section. If you do not, you will be charged for the meals by the school.

Even if your child is in key stage 1, if you receive any of the benefits listed above, you should also apply under the means-tested scheme so that the school can receive the extra funding detailed below.

Extra funding for your child's school

For every valid application for free school meals, not only will your child receive a healthy, nutritious meal, but your school can claim additional funding called pupil premium.

The amounts the school can claim are as follows:

2024/25

Primary - reception to year 6    £1480

The school can claim this funding which can really help to provide the best environment to support your child's learning and development.

If you qualify, the school or schools that your child or children attend will be informed and means-tested free school meals will be available immediately.

If your child was entitled to receive a free school meal on April 1, 2018, or became entitled at any time after this date, in the majority of cases they will be protected to receive their free meal until Universal Credit has been fully rolled out.

This is estimated not to be until at least March 2025 for most cohorts. 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).

**You do not need to tell us if your circumstances change unless:**

your child changes school or you move out of the area

you have moved into the area

you stop being responsible for the child or children concerned

you no longer give us consent to use the information provided or no longer wish your child to receive a free school meal

You can report any changes by phone or email using the contact details below.

(If your financial circumstances change and you commence work once again your child/children will continue to receive free school meals, you do not need to declare you are working or no longer in receipt of benefits).

Sometimes to process your application the FSM Team may need to request additional information and would contact you in the first instance for this. It may be easier for your school to obtain that information for us on your behalf. If this is an option there is a section on the application form which you can inform us that you are giving your consent for us to advise the school that we have asked you for further additional information, we won't tell the school what it is we are requesting.

However, it would allow the school to ask you to provide what it is we have requested, as this may speed up the time, we take to process your application. Please ensure you complete the relevant part of the form in the declaration section.

If there is a change to your child or children's eligibility for free school meals, the team will automatically notify us.

Any data collected as part of this application will be treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act and used in accordance with the council's data use principles. Further details can be found at [www.gateshead.gov.uk/data-protection](http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/data-protection)(opens new window)

#### **Please Contact:**

Free School Meals Team, Benefit Section, Civic Centre, Regent Street

Gateshead, NE8 1HH Tel: 0191 433 3729 E: [benefitsfsm@gateshead.gov.uk](mailto: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](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/carer 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 £3.00/Weekly £15.00

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 School Gateway 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 School Gateway 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