



# Ralph Butterfield Primary School

## School Meal Provisions and Debt Management Policy

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## **Statement of intent**

Ralph Butterfield Primary School 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/carers 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/carer will agree that this is unacceptable, and we encourage that all parents/carers give this policy their full support

## 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'

## 2. Charging for school meals

School meals are available to pupils at a cost ([click here for the current meal cost](#)), or at no cost to those in receipt of Free School Meal (FSM) or Universal Infant Free School Meal (UIFSM) entitlement.

Payments will be expected from parents/carers for school meals in advance of the meals being required. Payments can be made weekly, fortnightly, monthly or when the account nears zero; payments are to be made using our online payment system (ParentPay).

Where a pupil's meal has been paid for in advance and they are absent on the day of the meal (with notification received before 9am), the amount paid will be credited towards a future meal.

## 3. Free school meals (FSM)

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

Parents/carers who receive one or more of the following support payments will be entitled to receive FSM (assuming the parent/carer does not receive working tax credit):

- Universal Credit
- Income support
- Income-based jobseeker's allowance
- Income-related employment and support allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guaranteed element of pension credit
- Child tax credit (provided they are not also entitled to working tax credit and have an annual gross income of no more than the current threshold)
- Working tax credit run-on – paid for four weeks after they stop qualifying for working tax credit

A pupil will only be eligible to receive FSM when a claim for FSM has been made on their behalf, and their eligibility has then been verified by the Local Authority (City of York Council). Parents/carers will take responsibility for ensuring that they have claimed FSM for their child and will be aware that the entitlement to FSM cannot be backdated.

The school works with the Local Authority (City of York Council) to check the eligibility of all applicants for FSM, with the details of any entitlement then being recorded within the pupil's file. Applications for Free School Meals can be made via the [City of York Council Parent Portal](#).

#### 4. Management of school meal debts

Where there is an outstanding payment yet to be received and the acceptable credit period has been surpassed, the School Business Manager (SBM) will collate information regarding the value and reason for the debt, as well as the identity of the parent/carer who owes payment.

ParentPay will be used to record any debt and track any payments made towards the debt.

The steps of debt management are as follows:

- **Initial verbal reminder** – the school will initiate an informal correspondence, e.g. via telephone, notifying the parent/carer of debt.
- **First formal written reminder** – the school will send an official, dated letter addressed to the parent/carer two weeks after the first informal reminder, acknowledging that the informal reminder took place.
- **Second formal written reminder** – the school will send a second formal reminder two weeks after the first formal reminder, citing the details of both previous reminders and stating that concerted efforts have been made to make the parent aware that an outstanding debt is overdue.

Where the parent does not respond to the above reminders, the school will send a follow-up letter to the parent advising them that the case has been referred to the school's legal advisors and governing board.

The school will work with the parent/carer to establish, and agree on, a timeframe for a repayment or, if necessary, a payment plan for separate instalments.

The school will inform parents/carers that debts should be repaid as soon as possible, particularly after repeated reminders; however, delayed payments can be negotiated in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the governing board.

If there is a case where the parent/carer is deemed to be refusing to pay without sufficient reason, the school will consider involving the LA's legal services to resolve the issue and recuperate owed funds.

The school will ensure that a written record is kept of the date and time all reminders are sent and any responses to those reminders, including informal reminders.

## **5. Exceptional circumstance and remissions**

The school will ensure that parents/carers of pupils are aware of the help the school can extend to those in financial difficulty. Parents/carers who may be eligible for remissions will be considered to be those in receipt of any of the benefits outlined in [section 3](#) of this policy.

The governing board will consider, on a case-by-case basis, whether to waive or reduce the outstanding debt in these circumstances.

## **6. Monitoring and review**

This policy is reviewed every three years, by the governing board and Headteacher. The next scheduled review date for this policy is December 2026.

Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all parents/carers and relevant stakeholders.