



## **DINNER MONEY DEBT POLICY**

### **Background**

Bishop Bridgeman dinner money debt policy has been adopted to ensure a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners.

### **Provision of school meals**

Parents of pupils at Bishop Bridgeman have the choice of paying for a school lunch for their child or providing a healthy packed lunch. All school meals are prepared on the premises by our own team of cooks and meet the stringent guidelines laid down by the government regarding the provision of healthy school meals. We provide three choices of main course each day and work on a three week menu cycle.

Free school meals are available to those who qualify and we believe it is important that those who qualify take up their child's entitlement so that they can receive a cooked meal each day and the school receives the extra external funding it attracts. 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.

### **Cost of school meals**

School meals are available to children at a cost of £1.70 per day (£8.50 per week) or at no cost to those in receipt of free school meals entitlement (proof to be provided by the parent/carer). Any revision to the price of meals will be notified to parents/carers at least half a term prior to the new charge taking effect.

### **Payment for school meals**

School meals must be paid for in advance. Dinners may be paid on a weekly, half termly or termly basis. Payment by cash or cheque (payable to Bishop Bridgeman CE School) should be made on a Monday morning in a sealed envelope clearly marked with the child's name, class and the amount enclosed. This payment should be handed to the class teacher at morning registration. The teacher will annotate the register to indicate that a payment has been received.

The school will ensure that all dinner money collected is banked in a timely manner in accordance with the School's Financial Regulations which are periodically inspected by audit.

### **Management of School meal debt**

To ensure that the budget is not adversely affected by the cost of school meal debt we 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.

If a child arrives at school without a packed lunch or payment, or if a child's entitlement to FSM has ceased, the school will text/telephone the parent/carer in the first instance to establish if alternative arrangements have been made. When a child has failed to produce dinner money the school may allow a meal to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary situation e.g. lost or forgotten dinner money, temporary hardship etc.

If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a text detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent during the week requesting immediate payment to the school along with money for any other meals being taken during that week.

Prompt action will be taken to address any debt issue at an early stage in order to prevent arrears amassing. Where a child continues to require meals, the school must establish, to the best of its ability, 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 FSM or speak confidentially to the Principal.

If parents/carers make no attempt to contact or co-operate with the school then parents can expect no further assistance from the school. When the debt exceeds £8.50 for a child a formal letter will be sent (see Appendix A) to the parent/carer informing them to provide their child/children with a packed lunch to prevent further arrears.

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 and a drink only.

If the debt exceeds £25 for a family and/or action proves unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, the school should inform the local Safeguarding Team and 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 FSM has not been received (see Appendix B).

### **Monitoring and recovery of school meal debts**

At each meeting of the Audit Committee, the Principal will provide Governors with details of any outstanding dinner debt over £25 per family 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 incurring costly involvement of the school's solicitors. The school does however reserve the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal debt and inform the local authority that parents are failing to provide a child with a suitable meal at lunchtime.

Where necessary the school will utilise the small claims court, in which case parents/carers will be liable for all costs incurred in addition to the original debt. Such measures will be taken even after a child no longer attends the school if they have left not having paid all money owed.

**Reviewed: September 2019**

**Next Review Date: September 2020**