

# Earl Sterndale School

## Dinner Money Policy

Version History		
Version	Date	Detail
1.0	5.12.22	Approved by Governors at FGB – 5.12.22 – Min. No. 19
2.0	4.12.23	Approved by Governors at FGB – 4.12.23 – Min. No. 18
3.0	25.12.24	Approved by Governors at FGB – 25.11.24 – Min. No. 23

### **Background**

The Earl Sterndale School Debt Policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners. As the Local Authority is no longer accountable for the administration of dinner money debt the responsibility now falls on the school to pursue instances of non-payment. As a result the school budget will have to directly fund any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered thereby directly affecting the amount of money that is available to provide education to all pupils.

### **Provision of School Meals**

The Schools Meals Service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for by someone. Free School Meals are available for parents who meet certain criteria including the receipt of state benefits. Anyone who may qualify for Free School Meals should contact the school office for further information. Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that all parents/carers who qualify take up their child's entitlement so that they can receive a school meal each day.

Information on the entitlement to free school meals and an application form can be found on the Derbyshire County Council's website:

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your-child-at-school/meals/school-meals/free-school-meals.aspx>

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 £3.25 per day or at no cost to those in receipt of Free School Meals entitlement. School meals must be paid for in advance. Any revision to the school meal prices will be notified to parents/carers the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

### **Payment for School Meals**

Parents pay via ParentPay and should set up an account by speaking to the School Business Assistant.

### **Management of School Meal Debts**

To ensure that the school's budget is not adversely affected by the cost of school meal debt the Governors 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 free school dinners has ceased, the school will telephone/email 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. however details should be recorded in writing and a record maintained and monitored.

If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a letter/email detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting payment directly to the school within 7 days. The same process will be used if a cheque is not honoured by the bank. 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 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 free school meals or speak confidentially to the head teacher.

When the debt exceeds £10 for a *child or family* a formal letter must be sent 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 (*Example letter 1*).

If the debt exceeds £30 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 free school dinners has not been received (*Example letter 2*).

### **Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts**

At each meeting of the Governing Body/Finance Committee, the head teacher will provide Governors with details of any outstanding dinner money debt 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 referral to the School's solicitors. The School does however, reserve the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal debts and inform the local authority that a child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

All Write-offs of outstanding debt must be approved by the Governing Body/Finance Committee following submission of details of the debt by the head teacher together with reasons for no further action being taken.