



School Meals and Dinner Money Debt Policy

Reviewed: Annually

Date Reviewed: November 2025

Date of Next Review: November 2026

Background

This policy has been adopted to outline the schools procedures regarding school meals and to ensure a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school meals. It provides clarity in the management of the debt and helps parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

The Local Education Authority is no longer accountable for dinner money debt and 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.

Cost of School Meals

Unless your child is eligible for a Free School Meal then payment for meals must be made in advance.

The cost of meals will be notified to parents/carers at the end of the previous term to allow payment to be made in advance.

Universal Free School Meals are provided to children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2. Free School Meals are also available for parents/carers who meet certain criteria.

Your child could be eligible for a free school meal if you receive any of the following:

- **Income Support**
- **Income-based Jobseekers Allowance**
- **Income-related Employment and Support Allowance**
- **Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999**
- **The guaranteed element of State Pension Credit**
- **Child Tax Credit** (as long as you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and you don't get more than £16,190 a year)
- **Working Tax Credit run-on** (paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)
- **Universal Credit** (with annual earned income of no more than £7,400 after tax and not including any benefits you get).

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

hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/schools-and-education/at-school/free-school-meals/free-school-meals.aspx

Alternatively, please contact the school office.

If a child's entitlement to free school meals expires then the parent/carer must provide a packed lunch or pay in advance for a school meal.

Meal Patterns

The Live Kitchen system allows you to choose a meal for your child on any day of the week and up to a term in advance. Meals must be chosen before 09.30 on the day that the meal is to be taken in order to allow the kitchen enough time to prepare the meal. If your child is not in school e.g. due to illness, and you have booked meals in advance, please log onto Live Kitchen and remove your choice for that day and you will not be charged for the meal.

Payment for School Meals

All school meals must be paid for in advance via Live Kitchen. Payment can be made either on a weekly basis, half or whole termly.

Management of School Meal Debts

Your child will not be provided with a school meal unless it is paid for. If payment is not made then you must either provide a packed lunch or take your child home for lunch. The school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover this debt. If you continue to send your child to school after being notified without making arrangements for their lunchtimes, social services may be informed that you are not carrying out your responsibility to care for your child by not providing them with food at lunchtime.

The following actions will be taken promptly to address such issues at an early stage in order to prevent arrears of dinner monies from accumulating to a point beyond parents/carers means to settle:

- If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a letter/email (see Appendix A) will be sent to the parent/carer reminding them that dinner money is overdue. If payment is not received within 7 days then another letter (see Appendix B) will be sent detailing the consequences of non-payment and a final date by which payment must be made.
- If a parent repeatedly fails to provide a packed lunch, or sufficient monies to cover the cost of school meals, there may be a referral to Social Services as this has an adverse effect on pupils welfare.

Appendix A

Dear

Re: School Dinners

Could I remind you that school dinner money for this half term is now overdue. I would be grateful if you would make payment via the Live Kitchen system.

Please note that dinner money should be paid **in advance** at the start of each term, either on a weekly basis every Monday morning or half or whole termly. **If paying half or whole termly the dinner money should be received at the beginning of the half term.**

If dinner money is not received then unfortunately, we will have to request that you send your child into school with a packed lunch until such time as the debt is paid and the remainder of that terms dinner are paid for in advance.

I enclose a copy of the letter that was sent out at the beginning of term.

Yours sincerely,

Appendix B

Dear

Re: School Dinners

Further to our previous email of (insert date), could I remind you once again that school dinner money for this half term is well overdue.

We would be grateful if you would pay the amount (insert amount\) by (insert date) at the latest using the Live Kitchen system.

Unfortunately, if payment is not received by (insert date) then we will be unable to provide (insert child's name) with a school dinner and would ask that you send them in with a packed lunch until such time as the debt is repaid.

If the payment is not received then we may be forced to take further action.

Yours sincerely