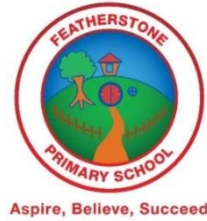


Featherstone Primary School



Dinner Money Debt Policy

Approved: 16th Jan 2025

Monitoring, evaluation and review: Every three years

BACKGROUND

Featherstone Primary School Debt Policy has been adopted to ensure a consistent approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners. The administration and the responsibility to pursue instances of non-payment falls to the school. 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. School wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents/carers to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals which they then find difficult to clear.

It is very time consuming for the School's office staff to continually chase parents for payment – by text, email, letter, phone call or in person. It is also highly embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative effect on our relationship with families.

PROVISION OF SCHOOL MEALS

The Schools Meals Service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for. Free School Meals are available for parents who meet certain criteria including the receipt of state benefits. 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.

Parents/carers who think they may qualify for Free School Meals should either:

- Complete an online free school meal eligibility check by logging onto www.link2ict.org/fsm , or
- If you would like school to complete the online check on your behalf, complete a 'Free School Meals and Pupil Premium' form available from the school office.

All pupils in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are entitled to receive a Universal Infant Free School Meal.

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

PAYMENT FOR SCHOOL MEALS

ParentPay

Parents/carers make payment online using a secure website called ParentPay. School will send an activation letter to parents/carers containing a unique user name and password. Parents/carers will then use these details to login and set up their account for the first time. The user name will then be changed to the parent/carers email address and the password to one of their own choice.

All school meals **must** be paid for in advance, preferably half termly. However, school understands that some families find it more affordable to top up their child's account weekly or whenever they are financially able to do so. Parents/carers must not send their child to school without any credit in their account and expect their child to be given a meal.

Outstanding Dinner money and debt recovery

Parents/carers who are experiencing difficulties in paying for school meals are requested to communicate with the school office. If the school does not receive any form of dialogue or communication from a parent/carer and/or requests for payment (explained below in step 1-3) are ignored, school will no longer be able to provide their child with a school meal. The debt will be passed to BFL Solutions, a debt recovery company. Once the debt has been passed to BFL Solutions, school can no longer liaise with the debtor or accept payment, the parent/carer must liaise with and pay BFL Solutions. Further **charges** may also be added to the debtors account.

MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOL MEAL DEBTS

Step 1: Weekly check:

£2 - £10 debt

- A reminder text/email will be issued to all parents/carers reminding them to top up their account

Step 2: Letter 1- £10 plus debt:

- A reminder letter will be issued by email asking parents/carers to top up their dinner money account before any further meals are ordered and to send their child to school with a packed lunch until the debt is cleared (appendix 1)

Step 3: Letter 2 - If debt is still o/s 7 days after letter 1 issued:

- A letter will be issued to parents/carers asking for the debt to be cleared within 7 days or the debt will be referred to BFL Solutions for recovery under their debt recovery procedures. Parents/carers will again be asked not order any meals until their account is in credit and to send their child to school with a packed lunch;

Step 4: Refer debt to BFL Solutions - If debt is still o/s 7 days after letter 2 issued:

- Parents/carers must now pay BFL direct as the matter has been passed to them and further **charges** will also be added to their account which will include £35 administrative cost by the school.
- Parents/carers are **no longer able to pay school directly** – the debt must be cleared with BFL;
- A Formal Demand will be issued immediately advising the debtor that BFL Solutions has been assigned to collect the debt;
- The debtor will be given the opportunity to contact BFL during their office hours, 9.00am to 8.30pm Monday to Saturday;
- BFL will contact the debtor by phone through their Telephone Collection's Department;
- If payment has still not been received, a follow up letter is sent after 7 days advising of a home visit to discuss the matter. Field Agent visits can be avoided by the debtor as long as they commit to a sensible payment arrangement;
- Field Agents will call upon a debtor's home normally 3 to 5 weeks following issue of the Formal Demand;
- Should a debtor ignore requests for payment or refuses to pay, the account will be referred to BFL Solution's Legal Team and in some cases, Litigation may be actioned;
- Their Legal service may file for a County Court Judgement, apply for a section N293A, and transfer up to a High Court Writ to include the use of High Court Enforcement to settle the debt.