



**Federation of
Westminster Special Schools
& Bi-Borough Inclusion Service**

Federation School Meal Debt Policy

Reviewed by Full Governing Board: July 2024

Next Review (by Finance & Premises Committee): May 2026

BACKGROUND

This policy has been written to help the Federation schools adopt a consistent approach to debt. It provides clarity and consistency to managing debt and will help parents/carers clearly understand what is expected of them.

The Federation's schools can only offer free meals to children and young people (CYP) whose parents qualify for Free School Meals (FSM) entitlement or fall within the age remit of the Mayor of London's free meals scheme (children of primary school age). In addition this has been extended for the 2024/5 academic year up to Year 9 for Westminster children and young people. All other meals must be paid for.

Since schools are invoiced for meals taken, it is essential that sufficient funds are credited for these meals into the central account of the school your (CYP) child or young person attends with cash, cheque or online payment deposit process. If there are insufficient funds then the schools are required to cover the shortfall from their budget, if a shortfall occurs the school is required to pay the difference. This results in money, which should be spent on the CYP's education being used to pay for debts incurred by parents/carers.

If parents /carers believe their CYP qualify for Free School Meals they can contact either School reception for more details and full information is also on the Federation website.

Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that parents/carers who qualify are encouraged to apply; parents/carers can receive help with their applications either via reception at either school.

School Admin staff remind parents to apply for FSM every summer and at various points throughout the year.

Payment for meals

Parents/carers must pay in advance for the school meals using the method of payment outlined below:

- Send cash or cheque in a marked envelope (CYP's name and class) or
- Make an online payment through ParentMail on the CYP's account.

CYP will not be provided with a school meal unless it is paid for, except those that are entitled to free school meals.

If the debt is accrued and not cleared, parents/carers will be required to provide a packed lunch.

In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the Headteacher or delegated person will phone the parent/carer to ask them to come to school with the money immediately. Otherwise, they must provide a packed lunch before lunch time.

If payment of the debt is not received on the next working day, the Headteacher reserves the right to begin legal proceedings against parent/carers to recover the debt. Social services may also be informed that the parents/carers are not carrying out their parental responsibilities by not providing a meal for their children at lunchtime.

It is hoped that by implementing this policy that we are able to help parents/carers manage school dinner money better and at the same time ensure that all money that is for CYP's learning is available.

Debt policy implementation

Key Information

1. All parents/carers will be provided with a copy of the school meal policy when their child joins the school.
2. All school meals must be paid for in advance.
3. No CYP should be sent to school without money in their account and expect to be given a meal.
4. Parents/carers, who don't want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch.

Protocol to be followed:-

Level 1

Indicator: A CYP's account goes into debt:

Check 1- Is the CYP entitled to a FSM, are dates correct?

Check 2- is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 3- does this parent/carer normally pay on time, is this just a one off?

Criteria checked then move to step 1.

Step 1: Parent/carer fails to pay for a CYP's school meal for a period of two weeks.

A reminder letter on school headed notepaper will be sent to the parent/carer at the end of the first week for which income has not been received this is generated via SIMS. Similar letters will be sent on a

weekly basis for two weeks. The third letter should state that provision of school meals may be withdrawn if no payment is forthcoming.

Level 2

Indicator: The child comes to school again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch.

Check 1- Is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 2- Has this parent made contact?

Criteria checked then move to step 2.

Step 2: Parent/carer fails to pay for CYP's school meal and this continues for a 4 week period

- a) School will continue to ask parent/carer for payment during the third week.
- b) After 3 weeks, the school will send a letter on school headed paper (to be sent as soon as possible during the fourth week without payment) to the parent/carer requesting that payment be made forthwith and within 7 days. **The letter must also state that if payment is not made then meals will not be provided to their CYP from the start of the following week and that the parent must make alternative lunchtime arrangements e.g. provision of a packed lunch.**

Level 3

Indicator: The parent/carer does not comply with any of these options,

Check 1- is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 2- has this parent made contact?

Criteria checked then move to step 3.

Step 3: Parent/carer continues not to pay for school meals – Meals have now been provided for four weeks without payment.

- a) Under these circumstances, meals would have continued to have been provided for the 4 week period and the debt will be mounting per CYP – with a family the debt could be significantly more.
- b) The deadline stated in the second letter has now expired and if the parent/carer has not paid, alternative arrangements should now be in place for the child's lunch. If alternative arrangements are not in place on the first day of the week the school need to remind the parent/carer to supply a packed lunch.

Level 4

Indicator: The parent/carer consistently does not comply with any of these options,

Check 1- is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 2- has this parent/carer made contact?

Step 4. Parent/carer continues not to pay for CYP's school meal beyond the 4 week period and after the second letter has been sent

- a) If, after exhaustive efforts, the school is not able to recover the debt that mounted up prior to meals being stopped, the school would request an external invoice to be raised.
- b) Bring in outside agencies, LA to advise, small claims court and social services

At all stages of the process parents/carers will be asked to apply for FSM if eligible to do so and offered support and advice e.g. pastoral team at College Park.