

# Greenbank Primary School



## Dinner Money Debt Policy

This policy has been compiled recognising the difficulties placed on school in balancing the social welfare of pupils with the responsibility of managing the School Budget.

## **Background**

At Greenbank Primary the School Dinner Money Debt Policy has been adopted to ensure a fair and consistent approach to debt incurred by parents/carers, whose children take school dinners. The school has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy relating to school meals. Money owed affects the school overall budget and must be settled promptly.

The school budget has to directly fund any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered through the Local Authority thereby directly affecting the amount of money that is available to provide education to all pupils.

## **Provision of School Meals**

The Provision of Schools Meals at Greenbank 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 or Universal Credit. Anyone who may qualify for Free School Meals should contact the school office for further information, or go to Rochdale Council: <http://www.rochdale.gov.uk/schools-and-education/Pages/free-school-meals.aspx>

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. Mrs Matthew (Pastoral Manager) will assist any parent in completing an application form for free school meals.

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.

If children are absent their dinner money is held on their account until required.

If a change of meal arrangement from packed lunch to school meal (or vice versa) is required, it is recommended to start at the beginning of a new half term. The School Office needs to be informed of changes to meal arrangements the half term **before** where possible.

If a child forgets their packed lunch and is given a school meal, parents must pay for the meal on the same day or the following morning at the latest (except for children on Free School Meals).

## **Cost of School Meals**

School meals are available to children at a cost of £2.15 per day or at no cost to those in receipt of Free School Meals entitlement or Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 children who have an entitlement to free school meals due to government legislation. 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**

Please make a payment on a Monday morning (or in the case of a new term starting on a different day, the first day back at school) using our online payment system, SIMS Pay. The School must 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. You may pay as little or as much as you want using the Pay360 (formerly SIMS Pay/Agora) System, as long as your account remains in credit.

## **Management of School Meal Debts**

To ensure that the School's budget is not adversely affected by the cost of School meal debt the School considers 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 if a child's entitlement to free school dinners has ceased, the School will telephone/text the parent/carer in the first instance to establish if alternative arrangements have been made.

When a child's account 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. 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 or text detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting payment through SIMS Pay. 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 should 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 or Pastoral Manager.

When a parent genuinely forgets to pay - the school may grant a debt allowance of 1 meal. The school will contact the parents advising them of the situation and the amount outstanding. This debt must be paid the next day and future meals must be paid for in advance before any meal is provided.

If this action proves unsuccessful in securing the money, a letter, email, call or text will be sent to the parents to provide a packed lunch.

In the case when a debt payment is still not received, nor a packed lunch provided, the school will phone the parent to ask them to pay the money immediately on SIMS Pay, provide sandwiches for lunch or take the child home for lunch.

If the outstanding debt remains unpaid the School will take action to recover this. School reserves the right to cease to provide the service of school meals where debts are recurring over a sustained period of time. In this instance parents should provide a packed lunch or collect their child at lunchtime.

Social services may be informed that parents are not carrying out their legal responsibility of care by not providing food for their child at lunchtime.

When the debt exceeds £10.75 for a *child or family* a ParentMail message will be sent to the parent/carer informing them to provide their child/children with a packed lunch to prevent further arrears.

Any parent struggling to register or use Pay360 can contact the office during the school day where the Business Manager or Admin Assistant can help.