

HOWITT PRIMARY COMMUNITY SCHOOL



Dinner Money Policy

May 2026

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Background

The Howitt Primary Community Dinner Money 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 Education 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:

http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your_child_at_school/meals/school_meals/default.asp?VD=freeschoolmeals

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 during the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

Payment for School Meals

Payment must be made online via Parent Pay.

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.

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 headteacher.

After the debt reaches **£16.25** (one week's dinner money), the school will send a text to parents reminding them of the payment. After the debt reaches **£25.00**, a letter will be sent to the parents reminding them of the amount outstanding and the need to pay as soon as possible. (appendix 1)

When the debt exceeds **£35.00** for a child or family, a formal letter (appendix 2) will be sent to the parent/carer informing them to provide their child/children with a packed lunch to prevent further arrears. The letter should also explain 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. If a parent fails to provide a packed lunch, the school will only provide a sandwich and a drink of water. Parents will still be charged for this as the school will still incur a cost.

Parents who have outstanding debts will be invited to a meeting with the headteacher and the business manager to discuss a payment plan to clear the debt. If the debt continues then the school will seek further legal advice.

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts

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 Trust'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 board following submission of details of the debt by the headteacher together with reasons for no further action being taken.

This policy will be reviewed every three years (any changes to prices will be made immediately) and will be used in line with the Financial Regulations of the school and the Safeguarding Policy.

Review Date: May 2029

Letter 1

Appendix 1

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

(Address Line 1)

(Address Line 2)

(Address Line 3)

(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)

According to the school's financial records you have not paid dinner money for your child (pupil name) in Class: xx. As at xx/xx/xx your account is showing a debt of £xx.

In order that the school's budget is not used to clear your child's debt please make arrangements for the outstanding dinner money debt to be paid immediately via ParentPay. Once you have cleared the current debt I should be grateful if you could ensure that you keep your account in credit. The current cost of a school meal is £x per day or £x per week.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information. **Remember that Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify, your child will then receive a school meal each day.** Additional information and an application form can be found on the Derbyshire County Council's website or in the school office if you do not have access to the Internet:

http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your_child_at_school/meals/school_meals/default.asp?VD=freeschoolmeals

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or wish to discuss the matter further please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Letter 2

Appendix 2

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)

(Address Line 1)

(Address Line 2)

(Address Line 3)

(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

School Meals provided to (Pupil Name)

I am writing regarding the current level of outstanding school meal debt that is showing on your account. Despite previous correspondences and messages the debt for your child xx in Class xx is still outstanding. The school's records show that as at xx/xx/xx your account is £x in debt. The current cost of a school meal is £x per day or £x per week.

I would ask that you please make arrangements to clear all the debt immediately and take steps to ensure your account is kept in credit in the future.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for further information. **Remember that Free School Meals are a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify, your child will then receive a school meal each day.** Additional information and an application form can be found on the Derbyshire County Council's website or in the school office if you do not have access to the Internet:

http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your_child_at_school/meals/school_meals/default.asp?VD=freeschoolmeals

Since the school has to fund all school meal debts from its budget it is essential that all payments are up to date so that the quality of the service provided to all pupils is maintained. ***Unfortunately, if the debt is not cleared by xxxxx a school meal will no longer be provided to your child and you must make your own arrangements for your child's lunch.*** The school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the outstanding debt and to inform the local authority that your child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher