

CORSHAM PRIMARY SCHOOL

Dinner Money Policy



Last reviewed: March 2025

Policy Ratified by the LGC: November 2025

Next Review Date: November 2028

Corsham Primary School

Dinner Money Policy

Introduction

Corsham Primary School Dinner Money Policy has been adopted to ensure that there is a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners at each site. 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 School 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/carers who meet certain criteria, including the receipt of state benefits. Anyone who thinks they 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 Wiltshire Council website [Free school meals - Wiltshire Council](#).

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 pay for a school dinner.

Universal School Meals

From September 2014, pupils in the Foundation Stage, Year 1 and Year 2 have been entitled to a free school meal, which is funded by the Government.

Cost of School Meals

School meals are available to children at a cost of £2.66 per day (price review September 2026) 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 the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

Payment for School Meals

Parents pay for school meals through their Arbor account. More information about this is available from the school office.

Management of School Meal Debts

To ensure that each school's budget is not adversely affected by the cost of meal debt, the Governors (delegated to Headteachers) consider the fairest system to all families is to pursue a rigorous approach. Although, this may seem harsh to some parents/carers it is important that the school budget is spent for the benefit of all our pupils and not a small number.

Prompt action will be taken to address any debt issue at an early stage in order to prevent arrears amassing. Reminders are sent by the school via Arbor once a debt becomes overdue. 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 Head teacher. When the debt exceeds £15 for a child, a formal letter must be sent to the parent/carer (Example letter 1). If after seven days no payment has been made, a further letter is to be sent informing them to provide their child/children with a packed lunch to prevent further arrears (Example letter 2). If the child/children is/are not provided with the requested packed lunch and the parent/carer cannot be contacted, the school will provide a sandwich and a drink only. If the debt exceeds £30 for a child and/or action proves unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, the school should inform the local Safeguarding Team and formally write to the parent/carer, explaining 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 (Example letter 3).

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts

The Headteachers will provide the Chair of Governors with details of any outstanding dinner money debt and the current position with regard to such debt if there are any concerns. 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 school'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 lunchtime. The Business Director and Headteacher must approve any write-offs of outstanding debt, following discussion outlining the debt together with reasons for no further action being taken.

Equal Opportunities

When writing and reviewing this policy, staff have completed an Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment in order to ensure it complies with equality obligations outlined in antidiscrimination legislation. We believe the policy positively reflects the aims and ambitions identified in Corsham Primary's Single Equality Scheme.

Example – Letter 1 (On School letterhead)

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.

Please arrange for the outstanding dinner money debt to be paid immediately. Once you have cleared the current debt, I should be grateful if you would ensure that you keep your account in credit. The current cost of a school meal is £2.68 per day.

If you think, you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the school office or the Wiltshire Council website [Free school meals - Wiltshire Council](#) 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 can be found on the Wiltshire Council website.

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

Example – Letter 2 (On school letterhead)

Parent or carer of (Pupil Name)
(Address Line 1)
(Address Line 2)
(Address Line 3)
(Post Code)

Date: XX/XX/XX

Dear xxx

Dinner Money for Corsham Primary School: (Child's Name)

Please note your Arbor account is currently in debt by £xx.

Due to this outstanding balance, we are going to put your account on stop, which means your child will not be able to order school lunches from xxx. Therefore, we request that you provide a packed lunch until the account is cleared in full.

If you are having problems accessing your Arbor account, please do not hesitate to contact the school office.

Thank you in advance for your co-operation with this matter.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

Example – Letter 3 (On school letterhead)

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 £2.68 per day. I would ask that you please arrange to clear this 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 Wiltshire Council website [Free school meals - Wiltshire Council](#) or in the school office if you do not have access to the internet.

Since the school has to fund any 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, as the debt was 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 lunchtime. If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher