Backworth Park Primary School

School Meals Provision and Debt Management Policy

September 2026

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Statement of intent

Backworth Park Primary School is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all pupils, regardless of financial circumstances, and has established the following policy and procedures to ensure that no child is discriminated against.

The governing board is responsible for ensuring that school meal provisions are accessible to all pupils and that procedures are in place for the recovery of any outstanding debt.

This policy has been adopted to ensure that there is a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents whose children eat school meals. The responsibility falls on the school to pursue instances of non-payment.

The school budget will be directly affected by any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered, thereby directly affecting all pupils in school. We are confident that every parent will agree that this is unacceptable, and we encourage that all parents give this policy their full support.

1. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- The Education Act 1996
- The Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014
- DfE (2018) 'Charging for school activities'
- DfE (2020) 'Governance handbook'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Complaints Procedures Policy
- Charging and Remissions Policy
- Whole-school Food Policy

2. Charging for school meals

School meals are available to pupils at a cost of £2.60 or at no cost to those in receipt of FSM entitlement.

Payments will be expected from parents for school meals in advance of the meals being required. Payments can be made weekly, fortnightly, monthly or when the account nears zero. Payment can be made using our online payment system via School Gateway app.

Pupils must have credit on their account in order to have a school meal. If parents and carers do not wish their child to have a school lunch; children must bring a packed lunch. Cash payments cannot be made.

3. Free school meals (FSM)

There is a statutory right to FSM for families who meet certain criteria. It is important that all parents who qualify take up their entitlement so that their child can receive a school meal each day.

Parents who receive one or more of the following support payments will be entitled to receive FSM (assuming the parent does not receive working tax credit):

- Universal Credit
- Income support
- Income-based jobseeker's allowance
- Income-related employment and support allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guaranteed element of pension credit
- Child tax credit (provided they are not also entitled to working tax credit and have an annual gross income of no more than the current threshold)
- Working tax credit run-on – paid for four weeks after they stop qualifying for working tax credit

A pupil will only be eligible to receive FSM when a claim for FSM has been made on their behalf and their eligibility has been verified by North Tyneside Council. Parents will take responsibility for ensuring that they have claimed FSM for their child and will be aware that the entitlement to FSM cannot be backdated.

4. Management of school meal debts

In the event that a child is without credit and no packed lunch has been provided, school will provide children with a basic lunch option which will incur a cost to parents and carers. The SBM will create an invoice outlining the value and reason for the debt, as well as the identity of the parent who owes payment.

Upon creating the invoice and stipulating a date on which it must be paid by, the SBM will record in the school's records that the debt has been set up.

The steps of debt management are as follows:

- Initial written reminder – the school will initiate an informal correspondence, e.g. via email or text notifying the parent of the debt.
- First formal written reminder – the school will send an official, dated letter addressed to the parent two weeks after the first informal reminder, acknowledging that the informal reminder took place.
- Second formal written reminder – the school will send a second formal reminder two weeks after the first formal reminder, citing the details of both previous reminders and stating that concerted efforts have been made to make the parent aware that an outstanding debt is overdue.

Where the parent does not respond to the above reminders, the school will send a follow-up letter to the parent advising them that the case has been referred to the school's legal advisors and governing board.

The school will work with the parent to establish, and agree on, a timeframe for a repayment or, if necessary, a payment plan for separate instalments.

The school will inform parents that debts should be repaid as soon as possible, particularly after repeated reminders; however, delayed payments can be negotiated in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the governing board.

If there is a case where the parent is deemed to be refusing to pay without sufficient reason, the school will consider involving the LA's legal services to resolve the issue and recuperate owed funds.

The school will ensure that a written record is kept of the date and time all reminders are sent and any responses to those reminders, including informal reminders.

5. Exceptional circumstances and remissions

The school will ensure that parents of pupils are aware of the help the school can extend to those in financial difficulty.

Parents who may be eligible for remissions will be considered to be those in receipt of any of the benefits outlined in section 3 of this policy.

Where the school expects that a parent with an overdue debt may qualify for remissions, the headteacher will contact them with details of the different types of support available.

The governing board will consider, on a case-by-case basis, whether to waive or reduce the outstanding debt in these circumstances.

6. Monitoring and review

This policy is reviewed annually by the governing board and headteacher.

Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all parents and relevant stakeholders.