



Rowlands Gill Primary School **Policy for Managing Late Payment for** **School Meals**

Date: January 2017

Ratified by Governors: January 2017

Review Date: January 2019





January 2017

The policy has been written to help our school adopt a consistent approach to debt incurred by parents whose children take school dinners. The aim of the policy is to have a clear procedure for staff and parents.

The money for non- payment of meals must be paid for out of the school budget and this impacts directly on the education of the children. It is therefore important that we recover dinner money debt but we seek to do that bearing in mind the following points which have helped us formulate our approach:

- We will seek to always keep the needs of the children to the fore and will avoid any situation where a child is not fed either with a school meal or packed lunch.
- We recognise that dinner money debt can quickly escalate, so early and supportive intervention can prevent issues becoming unmanageable for parents and carers.
- In our dealings with dinner money debt we will operate in a discrete way keeping children out of discussions of the issues and respecting the dignity of parents and carers.
- We recognise that dinner money debt can be symptomatic of deeper problems that may have a detrimental affect on children's education and we will seek to support families who may be struggling with wider issues by signposting them to agencies who may be able to help.
- If issues arise we will start a dialogue as early as possible, not just relying on texts, emails or letters but by assigning a designated member of staff to deal with the issues.

Rowlands Gill Primary staff work with families to ensure non-payment of school meals is kept to a minimum. We will request parents accept support offered in relation to non-payment of schools meals including working with staff, keeping school informed of circumstances within the home and providing children with a packed lunch if necessary to stop debt accruing.

When appropriate, we will use the services of a Family Support Worker who will meet with the family to confidentially discuss their circumstances and who may be able to signpost the family to agencies or professionals who can give advice and support.

Staff cannot go into bags or personal belongings of the children so we rely on the children handing payments in when reminded. We are mindful that forgetful children and this can sometimes be the source of late payment of dinner money.

We request that payments are made in clearly marked envelopes with the child's name, class, amount and date the payment is for. We accept cash and cheques (made out to Gateshead County Council). Payments need to be made in advance - weekly, monthly, half termly or



termly. We ask that parents inform school if their payments will be irregular due to changes in circumstances.

We will do our best to help as many families as qualify to take up Free School Meals and our school office are able to provide help with filling in forms to make sure they are taken up if the family are entitled. Information and an application forms are available on the Gateshead County Council's website:

<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/Education%20and%20Learning/Schools/School-meals/Free-school-meals.aspx>

We direct families to this website and also keep copies in the school office if they do not have access to the Internet:

Application can be made either by contacting school or the Benefits Service directly (Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead, NE8 1HH. Telephone 0191 433 3729)

We recognise that applying for Free School Meals can sometimes be an uncomfortable issue for families to discuss so we try to regularly communicate this message:

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.

The procedure below will be followed from January 2017.



1 Start a dialogue as soon as possible.

Action by school Week 1

A text will be sent out every Friday to parents who have not paid for the previous week. This ensures early indication to parents that there is an outstanding payment.

2 Assign a designated member of staff

Action by school Week 2

The School Business Manager will contact parents if no payment has been received and discuss options for payment. A payment plan that suits both the school and family can be arranged if circumstances change. The SBM may suggest options including packed lunches, application for free school meals or support from the Family Support Worker. The SBM will explain the policy and further steps in the phone call.

3 Recognition that DMD (dinner money debt) could be symptomatic of deeper problems.

Action by school Week 3

A letter will be sent to parents if we have received no payments. (Appendix 1) The letter will ask for payment, offer support from the Family Support Worker and signpost families to support agencies. The SBM will follow up with a telephone call towards the end of the week to ensure they have received the letter.

Action by school Week 4

A meeting will be arranged between the Head Teacher and parents to discuss the outstanding payments. (Appendix 2)

Example:- Joe Smith does not pay dinner money on Monday 9/1/17.

Week 1 Staff text parents on Friday 13/1/17 to advise there is a payment missing.

Week 2 Parents send money in on Monday 16/1/17 – No further action.

No money or contact received from parents- SBM contacts them by telephone on Friday 20/1/17 to request payment and discuss if there is support needed.

Week 3 Payment received – No further action.

No payment received- Monday 23/1/17 Letter to parents offering support from the Family Support Worker. (See Appendix 1) Telephone call to parents Friday 27/1/17 to ensure they received the letter.



Week 4 Payment received – No further action.

No payment received – Meeting arranged with HT to discuss debt.

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)

I contacted you on DATE in relation to the outstanding payment and you advised XXXXXXXX (summary of conversation). However, there is still an outstanding balance of £XX as of DATE for school meals. We need this amount to be cleared as soon as possible. You may find it easier to put NAME on packed lunches until the amount is paid and if this is your option please let school know.

If you are finding it difficult to pay our school are able to offer the services of a Family Support Worker who can contact you and arrange a visit at a mutually convenient time. Many families find that the Support Worker is able to provide them with useful help and guidance: any discussions that you have with them about finance will be confidential.

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 Gateshead County Council's website or in the school office if you do not have access to the Internet:

<http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/Education%20and%20Learning/Schools/School-meals/Free-school-meals.aspx>

A meeting with the Head Teacher will be arranged if payment if not received by Monday XXXXX.

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,

Eileen Elliott
School Business Manager

Support Agencies.



www.stepchange.org

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

www.nationaldebtline.org



Appendix 2

Dear xxxxx,

Re Outstanding payments for school meals for XXXXXXXXXXXX.

I would like to meet with you to discuss the outstanding school meals payments owed for XXXXXXXXXXXX. The amount now stands at £xxxx.

The meeting will discuss options open to you in relation to how we can proceed to support you in this matter.

I am able to meet on DATE at TIME if this is suitable.

Please contact the office as soon as possible to agree or amend the date and time.

Yours faithfully,

Hannah Martin

Head Teacher