

## School Meals Debt Policy 2025

| Approved by |                         |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| Name:       | Mrs A Coxon             |
| Position    | School Business Manager |
| Signed:     | <i>A Coxon</i>          |
| Date:       | September 2025          |
| Review Date | September 2027          |

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|     | <b>Rationale</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 101 | Marden Bridge Middle School is committed to the safety and welfare of all students. As a school, we offer an in-house professional catering service provided by Mellors Catering Services to ensure our students have access to a wide range of nourishing and healthy food throughout the day. This supports our students' well-being and enables them to learn and develop effectively.                                                                  |
| 102 | We recognise that the majority of our families are supportive of the school and ensure payment for all school meals is made in advance. This policy is intended to outline our clear procedures and protocols for those occasions where debt does accumulate on a child's school meal account. The policy is intended to protect limited school resources whilst at the same time ensuring that parents/carers do not face a rising and unmanageable debt. |
| 103 | School budgets are very limited and costs are incurred in providing a school catering service. Prompt and advanced payment by parents/carers ensures that we are able to utilise our financial resources effectively and in line with government guidance, which is for the education of the students of the school.                                                                                                                                       |
| 104 | Parents/carers will be made aware of this policy electronically, and it will be available to view on the school website via the School Lunches section. Parents/carers will be provided with a copy of this policy when their child joins MBMS.                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|     | <b>Payment</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 201 | Items purchased from the school catering service must be paid for in advance. Parent/carers are able to make payment for school meals using our online secure payment platform, School Gateway. Parents / carers will need to set up their School Gateway account as soon as their child starts at Marden Bridge Middle School.                                                                                                                            |
|     | <b>Free School Meals</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 301 | Students who are entitled to a Free School Meal will be able to access the catering service up to the value of their Free School Meal Allowance, currently £2.60. This will enable students to purchase a meal at lunchtime.                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 302 | If parents/carers believe that their child may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals they should contact North Tyneside Council for more details. Further details are available on the school website <a href="http://mbms.org.uk">mbms.org.uk</a> Parents/carers requiring support in making an application should contact the                                                                                                                     |

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|     | <p>school office who will be pleased to provide assistance.</p> <p>This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|     | <b>ParentPay Account - Debt Management</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 401 | <p>To assist parents/carers in the management of their child's school meal accounts, reminders can be set on the School Gateway system to alert them when balances are running low. Parents/carers are strongly encouraged to utilise this facility.</p> <p>Each day, the school will send out a reminder by app message to parents/carers where any sum of money, regardless of amount, is owing on the account. The School Business Manager may call parents/carers to request for lunch accounts to be topped up as a matter of urgency.</p> <p>Parents/carers are asked to clear this debt as soon as possible and provide additional funds to cover any future purchases. Alternatively, parents /carers should send their child to school with a packed lunch until such time as they are able to provide funds onto the school meal account.</p> |
| 402 | <p>Without sufficient funds on their catering account, students will be unable to access the school catering service and parents/carers will be required to send their child into school with a healthy lunch and any snacks required for the full day.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 403 | <p>We recognise that on occasions, parents/carers may forget to top up their child's catering account and pay in advance for any food. We would not want any child to go hungry and so in this circumstance, school may grant a debt allowance of one meal deal at lunchtime. Following this allowance, parents/carers are asked to ensure that the account is paid in full by the next day and any future meals are paid for in advance to ensure students have access to a meal on a daily basis.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|     | <b>Stages for collecting debt payments</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 404 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daily app message sent to families when account falls into arrears. There may also be a phone call directly made to parents/carers.</li> <li>• If the debt reaches £15.00, parents /carers must send their child to school with a packed lunch(this will be communicated with parents/carers). A parental meeting will be set up by the school. The school is committed to working with parents/ carers to find a solution.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 405 | <p>Where the debt continues to remain unpaid and the balance reaches £15.00 or more, the following letters will be sent out by post to the parents/carers registered address as well as to email addresses on the school system, see Appendix 1.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

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| 406 | Where balances are in excess of £15.00 in debt, no further access will be allowed to the school catering facilities and parents/carers MUST provide adequate, healthy food for their child to access during the school day.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 407 | In addition, if the debt continues to remain unpaid, the school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings against parents/carers to recover the debt. Details of this process can be found in the attached flowchart at Appendix 2.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 408 | <p>It is recognised that the majority of families ensure that all school meals are paid for in advance. We also understand that circumstances change for some families over the course of their child's time with us, and any parents/carers experiencing difficulties in making payments for school meals are encouraged to contact the Finance team as soon as possible, to enable appropriate support.</p> <p>We have set the parameters in this policy as the school budget cannot subsidise family school meal debt, that is not what school educational funds are for.</p> |

## **Appendix 1**

### **Letter for Paid Meal Pupils**

Parents Address

**RE: School meal balance owing as at** (insert date)

Students Name - Amount owing £ XXXXXXX

Dear Parents Name

Further to several recent communications, our records indicate that you still have significant arrears on your child's school meal account. Unfortunately, until the debt is cleared, we must notify you that with effect from AAAAAAA you must send your child with a packed lunch and snacks each day as they will not be able to access the catering facilities.

May we take this opportunity to remind you that school meals should be paid for in advance and your account should always be in credit.

If you are finding it difficult to make payments due to a change in circumstances and you feel you may be eligible for Free School Meals please check your eligibility in the link below. If you are eligible please contact the school on the number below and we will help you with the application.

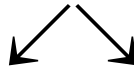
<https://my.northtyneside.gov.uk/category/238/free-school-meals>

Please note failure to provide your child with adequate food for the school day may be dealt with under our safeguarding protocols. In addition, should the debt remain unpaid we reserve the right to refer the matter to a debt collection agency.

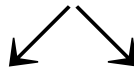
Thank you for your assistance in this matter, if you wish to discuss this further please do not hesitate to get in touch.

## Appendix 2 - Debt Management Flowchart

Debt on school meal account - Reminder  
sent daily Debt Cleared



| Yes                                                                 | No                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>No further action</b><br><br>Student accesses service as normal. | <b>Two further daily reminders sent.</b><br><br>Parents are expected to send food to school.<br><br>No food sent - call made to parents/carers.<br><br>The student has no access to food in school - lunch only is provided. |
| <b>Payment made</b>                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |



| Yes                                                                     | No                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>No further action</b><br><br>Student accesses the service as normal. | <b>Debt reaches £15.00 - Letter sent by post to registered address and email.</b><br><br>Access to catering facility removed.<br><br>Parents/Carers must provide healthy, nutritious food for student to access during the school day - lunch and any snacks required.<br><br>Where food is not provided, school will consider treating the matter as a safeguarding concern |