



Spon Gate Primary School

School Meals & Dinner Money Policy

Date last reviewed: June 2025

Date signed off by Headteacher and Governing body: June 2025

Date of next review: June 2028

Background

Our School Meals & Dinner Money Policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to the ordering of meals and managing of debt incurred by parents/carers whose children have 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

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.

Any child who receives an entitlement to free school meals between 1st April 2018 and 31 March 2025 will remain entitled to a Free School Meal regardless of any change in parental income until they finish the phase of education they are in (primary or secondary) as of 31 March 2025. Free school meal entitlements awarded from the 1st April 2025 are awarded based on the claimant's current circumstances and do not have the same protection. These awards are reviewed and may end if the claimant falls out of the thresholds for the entitlement criteria. When your child leaves Spon Gate, you may need to reapply for Free School Meals before they start secondary school.

Cost of School Meals

School meals are available to children at a cost of £2.20 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 the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

Payment for School Meals

Spon Gate Primary School accept the following methods of payment for those parents who pay for meals-

- Credit/Debit Card via the MCAS (My Child at School) app.
- Bank Transfer to the School's Current Account (Use child's name and the word Dinner as the payment reference)
- Cash Payment (at the start of the week, in a sealed envelope clearly marked with your child's name and class number, and amount enclosed)

Cash payments should be handed to the School Office only. The School must ensure that all dinner money collected is banked in a timely manner in accordance with the School's Financial Regulations which are periodically inspected by audit.

The school will manage overdrawn meal balances using the framework and process chart in Appendix 1 and 2. If substantial arrears cannot be recouped by the school in a reasonable timeframe, the account will be passed onto the Coventry City Council's Legal Team to initiate the procedure for collection, although every attempt will be made to avoid this option.

Claiming for a Free School Meal

The entitlement to Free School Meals will be processed as part of Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support claims by the Benefits Service. Free School Meals are a statutory benefit and the School gets extra funding to help children in their education (pupil premium- up to £1480 a year per child)

Free school meals are available to children of families who are in receipt of:

- Universal Credit (you are eligible after you have received your first payment) Your household earnings must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you get))
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- The guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)

How to claim:

Applications for free school meals can be made using the following online process:

<https://www.coventry.gov.uk/benefits-1/free-school-meals/3>

Please ensure you have completed all of the relevant information on your application form, ensuring that you have included the claimants correct National Insurance Number /or NASS reference number and date of birth.

You are no longer required to provide proof to the school of your benefit entitlement. Your eligibility for Free School Meals is processed via a database held by the Department of Works and Pensions. The Coventry City Council may contact you for any additional information in relation to your application.

Universal Free School Meals - Reception, Year 1 & 2

The government provides funding to the school to offer free school meals to pupils in reception, year 1, and year 2 (roughly aged 4-7 years)

This is automatically applied by the school so there is nothing further for the parent/carer to do other than select their child's meals in a timely manner.

Free School Meals – No recourse to public funds (NRPF)

The Government have permanently extended free school meal eligibility to children in all households with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), subject to maximum income thresholds.

Your child will be able to get Free School Meals if you fall into one of the following eligible groups

- Zambrano carers
- families who have no recourse to public funds with a right to remain in the UK on grounds of private and family life under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights

- families receiving support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 who are also subject to a no recourse to public funds restriction
- a subset of failed asylum seekers supported under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Chen carers
- families holding a BN(O) passport
- spousal visa holders
- work visa holders
- student visa holders
- those with no immigration status

You will also need to evidence that your annual household income is below
 £22,700 for families with 1 child
 £26,300 for families with 2 or more children

In addition to these thresholds, families must hold no more than £16,000 in capital and savings.

Schools and local authorities are not able to use the eligibility checking system (ECS) to confirm eligibility for these families as the family will not be in receipt of Universal Credit or legacy benefits.

If you feel that you may be eligible for free school meals through NRPF, you will need to complete an application with the school who will ask for copies of evidence of your status and income.

Ordering School Meals

Spon Gate Primary School uses the MCAS app/website for the ordering of all school meals.

Parents/Carers will be supported in setting up an account on the MCAS platform where they can gain more control over their child's meal choices as well as meal patterns.

This both streamlines the ordering process as well as helping minimise wastage as food is prepared to order.

Parents/carers will need to select choices through the app/website at least a week ahead (by 2pm on Friday, the week before) for the meal request to be processed.

Children who have not had a meal selected by the cut-off point, will need to have a Packed Lunch provided for the whole of the following week.

The school will support parents/carers with whole school reminders to select meals through MCAS notifications during the week, as well as send lists of missing choices to Class Teachers so they can approach adults directly at the gate. The school will also send individual notifications and messages on the cut-off date to serve as an additional and final reminder to select meals for the following week.

Ordering Exceptions

The Headteacher is able to apply some discretion to meals ordered in exceptional circumstances.

Parents/carers new to the school will get the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the ordering process and will be given a demonstration- should they require one- on how to use

MCAS to place orders. On the first occasion, where there is failure for meals to be inputted, the child may be offered a school meal, however it may not be the child's preferred choice if the meal they would like is not available.

The school will make alternative arrangements for meal inputs for families who are without access to the internet, a smartphone, PC, laptop or tablet and children who are temporarily in the Care of the Local Authority.

Any other exceptional circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the Headteacher.

Menu

Spon Gate Primary School provide a two-week cycle menu. The school will try to limit the number of menu changes to a maximum of two in an academic year. Parents/carers will be notified in advance of changes.

The options provided on menus will be selected in line with the school's Healthy Eating Policy.

Each year, the school will provide options for a Christmas menu as a one-off during the festive period.

In the event that a product or ingredient on the menu was not available, the school will try to substitute the item with the closest or similar product.

Allergens & Dietary Requirements

All meals offered by the school will have allergen information highlighted on the paper menu and on the MCAS app. The school also has details around allergens on the school website.

Children who are entitled to Free School Meals and suffer from specific allergies which would stop them from having food off the menu, can request specially ordered food. The school would need to receive this request in writing and would be required to see medical evidence of the diagnosis.

The school does not provide Halal meat options on its menu.

Management of School Meal Debts

All meal accounts are monitored weekly.

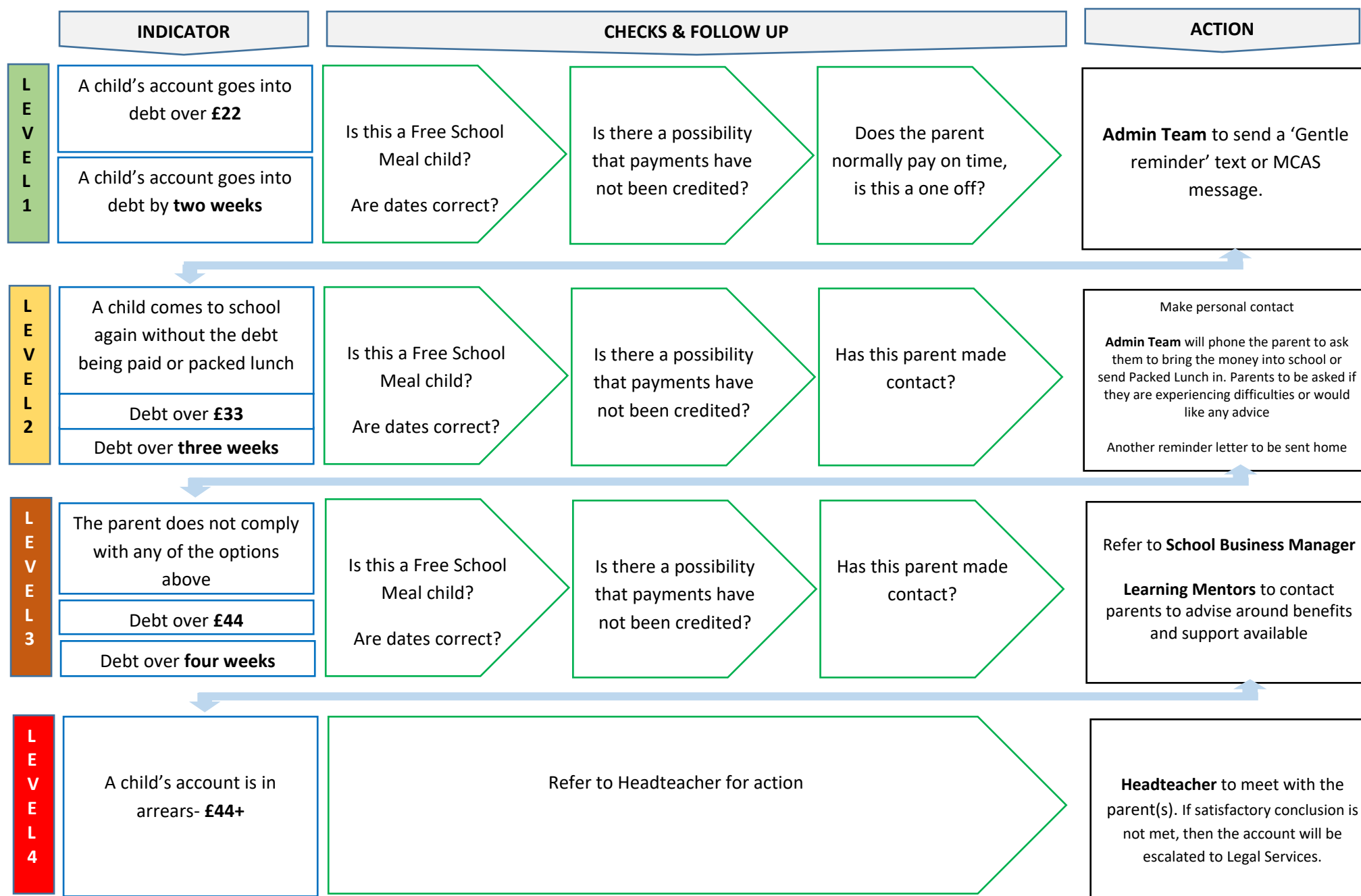
Appendix 1 and **Appendix 2** outline how the school will address instances where debt has accrued and money is owed to the school in relation to meals.

Balances for accounts which remain overdrawn for longer periods of time, may automatically be switched to Packed Lunch to prevent the arrears from becoming unmanageable.

If satisfactory conclusion is not met at the end of the arrears management process, then the account will be escalated to Legal Services.

MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOL MEAL DEBTS

PROCESS CHART



APPENDIX 2

Framework for Managing School Meal Debt

Level 1	Indicator: A child's account goes into debt (over £22/two week)	Check 1 is this a Free School Meal child, are dates correct? Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited? Check 3 does this parent normally pay on time, is this just a one off?	Action 1: Admin team to send a 'Gentle reminder' text or MCAS notification
Level 2	Indicator: A child comes to school again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch (over £33/three weeks)	Check 1 is this a Free School Meal child, are dates correct? Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited? Check 3 has this parent made contact?	Action 2: Make personal contact Admin team will phone the parent to ask them to either bring the money into school or bring sandwiches in. Parents to be asked if they are experiencing difficulties or would like any advice Another reminder letter to be sent home
Level 3	Indicator: The parent does not comply with any of these options (over £44/four weeks)	Check 1 is this a Free School Meal child, are dates correct? Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited? Check 3 has this parent made contact?	Action 3: Refer to SBM Learning Mentors to contact parents to advise parents around benefits and support available
Level 4	Indicator: A child's account is in arrears - £44+	Refer to Headteacher for action	Head teacher to meet with the parent (s). If satisfactory conclusion is not met, then the account will be escalated to Legal Services.