



# CLAREMONT PRIMARY SCHOOL

## SCHOOL MEALS ADVANCE PAYMENT POLICY

**Date: Spring 2020**

**Next review: Spring 2021**

### **Aims**

- To outline the school's procedures regarding payment for school meals.
- To establish a system to allow the school to work with parents/carers to ensure the smooth, efficient and cost effective operation of the school dinner system.
- To clarify the roles and responsibilities of school staff, meal providers and parents/carers with regard to payment or provision of meals and the avoidance of school meals debt.
- To present a workable, fair mechanism for the collection of school dinner money.

### **Background**

Pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 are entitled to a school meal at no charge under the Universal Infant Free School Meal (UIFSM) programme.

School meals are available to Key Stage 2 pupils (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) at a cost to parents/carers (see website/school office for current cost). For those in receipt of a free meal (FSM) entitlement there is no cost. Information regarding free school meal entitlement can be found on the Kent County Council website, under Free School Meals. <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools/free-school-meals>

Claremont Primary School undertakes to provide (through our chosen meal provider, The Contract Dining Company) a full, cooked, nutritious lunchtime meal for each pupil who has paid or who is entitled to a Free School Meal.

A small minority of parents have not been paying for their children's meals, despite repeated requests, which has meant that the school has had to cover the cost, at the expense of other education provision.

### **The School Meals Advance Payment Policy**

This policy has been written to help our school adopt a consistent approach to payment for school meals and towards any debt incurred by parents/carers who do not pay for their children's/wards' school meals. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents/carers clearly understand what is expected of them.

School meals cost money, and parents have to pay in advance if they want their children to eat them, unless they are entitled to Free School Meals or Universal Infant Free School Meals. Parents who do not pay incur a debt and meal debts not recovered by the catering company have to be paid by the school. It is not acceptable that the limited school budget be used to cover the cost of school meals not paid for by parents. Consequently, the governors at Claremont Primary School have decided that a 'zero tolerance' approach to any debts incurred by non-payment for school meals should be adopted, while of course offering help and support where needed.

Our policy is therefore that parents will be expected to pay in advance for their children's school meals (unless they are in receipt of FSM or UIFSM), and that any non-payment (after reminders and suitable opportunities to pay) will mean that meals cannot be provided and appropriate action will be taken by the school (see below).

Parents/carers are welcome at any time to make an appointment to see Mrs Crockett, Mrs Roberts or Mrs Street if they wish to be provided with support from external agencies regarding financial difficulties or any other concerns.

The school will make parents/carers aware of this policy in the following ways:

- A letter to parents/carers (Appendix 1)
- A copy of the policy will be provided to all parents when their child/ward joins the school.
- Reminders in the school's newsletter
- The school website

This will ensure that all parents/carers get the same message in a consistent way. This will be done at least once each year, and a letter announcing the policy will be sent to all parents before it is first introduced.

### **Key Principles**

All parents/carers are provided with a copy of this policy when their child/ward joins the school.

All school lunches must be paid for in advance.

No pupil should be sent to school without money or credit in their account and expect to be given a meal.

Parents/carers who don't want their child/ward to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch.

### **Payment methods**

Payment can be made:

**Either** via [www.claremont.kent.sch.uk](http://www.claremont.kent.sch.uk) Scroll to the bottom of the main page and click the 'SchoolGateway' button then follow the instructions.

**Or** by sending cash or cheque (made payable to The Contract Dining Company) in a clearly marked envelope (pupil's name, class and amount enclosed).

### **Recovery of payment implementation**

Below are the procedures which will be followed when parents have not paid for school meals for their child(ren).

#### **Level 1**

Indicator: A pupil's account goes into debt

Check 1 is this a FSM pupil, are dates correct?

Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 3 does this parent/carer normally pay on time, is this just a one off?

Action: Send a 'Gentle first debt reminder' when the account goes into deficit.

#### **Level 2**

Indicator: A pupil comes to school again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch

Check 1 is this a FSM pupil, are dates correct?

Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?

Check 3 has this parent/carer made contact?

Action 2: Personal contact: someone will phone the parent/carer to ask them to either bring the money into school, pay online or bring sandwiches in before lunchtime.

### **Level 3**

- Indicator: The parent/carer does not comply with any of the Level 2 options
- Check 1 is this a FSM pupil, are dates correct?
- Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3 has this parent/carer made contact?
- Action 3: Send a 'Final debt letter' if within 24 hours of the phone call (72 hours if a weekend in-between) the account has not moved into credit.

### **Level 4**

- Indicator: The parent/carer consistently does not comply with any of the options and has not responded with payment following the 'Final debt letter':
- Check 1 is this a FSM pupil, are dates correct?
- Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3 has this parent/carer made contact?
- Action 4: LA to advise on appropriate next actions to recover payment whilst ensuring the welfare of the child and referral to external services where appropriate.

## **Appendix 1: Letter to parents explaining School Meals Advanced Payment Policy**

Dear Parents/Carers

### **School Meals Advance Payment Policy**

I am writing to let you know of an important change to the way that Claremont manages non-payment for school meals. We appreciate that the majority of the parents pay for the meals for their children in advance, but because of a small number who do not, the Governors decided that from January 2017 the school should adopt a strict payment in advance policy for school meals.

As you know, parents pay the catering contractor CDC in advance for the meals their children eat. Occasionally, parents fail to pay and the children still eat a school meal, so the catering company will chase for payment. If the caterers are unable to get back the money owed to them, they bill the school for the missing money, and the school has to pay which obviously diverts money from the education pot. In the past this has been a considerable amount of money and we want to ensure we have a fair policy in place to firstly remind and secondly to collect from non-payers in the future.

As described in the parent handbook section on the school website (where you will also find a link to the school meal provider CDC) if parents want their child(ren) to receive a school meal, they must pay for that meal in advance. We understand there may be circumstances in which parents can forget to pay in advance and allowances will be made for this for one meal only. The account must be paid off the next day, and future meals paid for in advance.

Pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 do not need to pay for school meals. Pupils eligible for Free School Meals do also not need to pay. If you think that you may qualify for Free School Meals please refer to the Kent County Council website <https://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools/free-school-meals> for details or if you have any difficulty with payment we are always happy to discuss this and signpost parents for support.

We hope that you appreciate that this policy exists to make sure that no one exploits the system, and that we can spend all the money we have on providing an excellent education for all Claremont children. Full details of this policy and the procedures can be found on the website, via the Staff, Governors and Policies section.

If you have any concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Mrs C Roberts  
Head Teacher