



# SCHOOL MEALS DEBT RECOVERY POLICY

2025-2028

**Penbridge Infants & Junior School**

Part of the Thinking School's Academy Trust

Date of determination February 2025

Review Date February 2028



CHILD FIRST – ASPIRE – CHALLENGE – ACHIEVE

## PURPOSE

Penbridge School Meals Debt Recovery Policy has been written to help our organisation adopt a consistent approach to debt incurred by parents whose children take school dinners. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

The Free School Meals system is there for parents of children of all ages to claim if they are in receipt of certain benefits; information is available from the school office or [Apply for free school meals - GOV.UK](#)

All pupils in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are entitled to receive Universal Infant Free School Meals.

**Therefore, this policy only relates to pupils in Key Stage 2 (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) whose parents pay for school meals.**

Penbridge School and The Thinking School Academy Trust wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals which they then find difficult to clear.

School meals must be paid for in advance using any of the methods of payment outlined below:

- Online at [www.parentpay.com](http://www.parentpay.com)
- Pay Point bar code (available from the school office)

In order to support you in managing this, we have set up reminders through our ParentMail/MyEd system, which will notify you when your child's meal account has reached its minimum balance. This reminder is intended to encourage timely top-ups, so that your child can continue to enjoy school meals without any disruption.

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school will grant a debt allowance of **Two school meals**. However, this debt must be paid the next day and future meals must be paid in advanced before any meal is provided.

A member of staff at the school will monitor meal accounts and check for any students in arrears or with insufficient funds. For students with negative balances, access to school-provided meals will be temporarily restricted. In these cases, parents or guardians will be notified, and the student will need to bring a packed lunch from home until the account is topped up.

In exceptional circumstances, if the school authorises a child to receive a meal despite an insufficient balance, the cost of the meal will be temporarily covered by the school's budget. This will, however, create a debt that parents will be responsible for repaying. We advise parents to avoid this situation by regularly checking and updating meal account balances.

Please understand that meal account debts should be avoided as much as possible. We encourage parents and carers to regularly monitor and maintain

funds in your child’s account will help avoid complications and ensure a smooth, enjoyable lunchtime experience for your child.

By implementing this policy, we are aiming to help parents limit unmanageable dinner money debts.

### SCHOOL MEAL DEBT – ACTION TIMELINE

Timeline	ACTION TO BE TAKEN
Step 1	<p>Children will only be able to order two dinners before they are no longer able to order. Class teacher is to send child to the office so they can call the parent and ask them to either clear the debt or send in a packed lunch.</p> <p>If necessary, provide only a school packed lunch this must be authorised by a member of SLT and must be paid for by the parent.</p>
Step 2	<p>Debt remains unpaid Text reminder to parent to ask them to pay online.</p> <p>Request for packed lunch for following day to be provided until debt cleared.</p>
Step 3	<p>Debt remains unpaid letter sent to parents to ensure a packed lunch is provided until debt is cleared.</p>
Step 4	<p>Debt remains unpaid Head of School informed of situation.</p> <p>Packed lunch must be provided by the parent.</p> <p>2<sup>nd</sup> Debt Letter sent from Head of School</p>
Step 5	<p>Debt remains unpaid A final letter is sent to set up a meeting with the Head of School to consider action.</p> <p>Packed lunch must be provided by home until the debt has been cleared / as long as the child is being provided with a home packed lunch.</p>

## Letter1

### Date

Dear [Parent's Name],

I hope you are well. We are writing to inform you that there is an outstanding balance on your child's school dinner account, which currently amounts to [Amount Due]. We kindly request that this balance be settled by [X Date].

School meals must be paid for in advance using any of the methods of payment outlined below:

- Online at [www.parentpay.com](http://www.parentpay.com)
- PayPoint bar code (available from the school office)

Payment made at a pay point may take up to 3 working days to show on our systems.

We understand that some families may experience financial difficulties, and if you are struggling to make the full payment, we are more than happy to arrange a payment plan that suits your circumstances. Please contact us as soon as possible to discuss options for setting up a plan.

However, if we do not receive payment or communication regarding a payment plan by [X Date], we will unfortunately need to pause your child's dinner account. This means that, moving forward, you will need to provide your child with a packed lunch until the debt is cleared.

Please reach out to us as soon as possible to avoid any disruption to your child's meals. You can contact the school office on 03333602190 for any questions or to discuss payment options.

Thank you for your understanding and prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to resolving this issue with you.

Warm regards,

[Your Full Name]

[Your Position, if applicable]

## Letter 2

Dear [Parent's Name],

I am writing to follow up on my previous correspondence regarding the outstanding dinner debt of [student's name] at Penbridge School.

As of today, I have not received any payment nor further contact to resolve the matter.

I would like to arrange a meeting on [X date and time] to discuss the situation and work toward a resolution. Please confirm if this time is convenient or suggest an alternative.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

[Your Full Name]

[Your Position, if applicable]