



Lunch Payment Policy

**Julia Miles
November 2022**

Introduction

The Norwich Road Academy Lunch Payment Policy has been adopted to ensure that a consistent and fair approach to payment and debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school lunches. The administration of lunch money debt is the responsibility to pursue instances of non-payment. As a result, the academy 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

The provision of school meals is no different to any other business, in that meals have to be paid for by someone. 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.

Free School Meals

Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2

Children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 are offered Universal Free School Meals. This is regardless of your household income.

You do not have to apply for Universal Free School Meals. However, if you receive one of the benefits list below, you can apply for the academy to get extra funding from the government. This extra funding is called Pupil Premium. If you are receipt of one of the benefits listed, we would urge you to apply.

- Universal Credit - with an annual earned income of no more than £7,400 after tax
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Working Tax Credit run-on (paid for the four weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)
- Child Tax Credit (with no Working Tax Credit) with an annual gross income of no more than £16,190

Children in Year 3 and above

Children in Year 3 and above only receive free school meals if you get one of the benefits listed above. You must apply for these Free School Meals, otherwise you will be expected to pay for your child's lunch. If an application is successful, the academy will also receive the Pupil Premium funding.

How to apply for Free School Meals

You can apply for Free School Meals online using your Norfolk Education Online (NEO) account. You can use the same account for 2-year-old childcare funding and school admissions. If you have applied for school admissions online before, you may already have an account.

Information on the entitlement to Free School Meals and an application form can be found on the Norfolk County Council website:

www.norfolk.gov.uk/education-and-learning/schools/school-meals-and-milk

If a child's entitlement to Free School Meals expires or the parents/carers personal circumstances change, the parent/carer must provide a packed lunch or send payment in advance for a school dinner.

Cost of School Meals

School meals are available to children at a cost of £2.40 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

Meals should be paid for in advance, each Monday. This can be weekly, monthly or termly. Payments can be paid for using our online Scopay (Tucasi) payment system as we no longer accept cash. Our academy office can help you set this up, if needed

Management of School Meal Debts

To ensure that the academy's budget is not adversely affected by the cost of school meal debt, the Leadership consider the fairest system to all families is to pursue a proactive approach. It is important that the academy budget is spent for the benefit of all our pupils, in supporting learning and not a small number on lunch debt. If a child arrives at school without a packed lunch or payment, or if a child's entitlement to Free School Meals has ceased, the academy will telephone/text the parent/carer in the first instance to establish if alternative arrangements have been made.

When a child has failed to produce lunch money, the academy may allow a meal to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary situation. e.g. Lost or forgotten lunch money, temporary hardship etc. however details should be recorded in writing and a record maintained and monitored.

Stage 1

If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a letter/text detailing how much is owed will be sent to the parent/carer requesting payment directly to the school within 7 days. Prompt action will be taken to address any debt issue at an early stage in order to prevent arrears amassing. Where a child continues to require meals, the academy must establish if the child is entitled to Free School Meals, or if the parent/carer is experiencing hardship which affects their ability to pay. Under these circumstances the parent/carer should be invited to apply for free school meals or speak confidentially to the Principal.

Stage 2

When the debt exceeds £10 for a child or family, a formal letter must be sent to the parent/carer informing them to provide their child/children with a packed lunch to prevent further arrears. If the child/children is/are not provided with the requested packed lunch and the parent/carer cannot be contacted, the academy will provide a sandwich and a drink only. (Example letter 1).

Stage 3

If the debt exceeds £30 for a family and/or action proves unsuccessful in securing dinner money arrears, this will be treated as a safeguarding concern, as ongoing provision has not been made for the child's lunch. The academy will formally write to the parent/carer, explaining that the academy has a concern and is not obliged to provide a school dinner where advance payment is not forthcoming or where authorisation for free school dinners has not been received (Example letter 2).

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts

If parents do not contact the academy regarding the debt and no payment is paid, additional administration costs may be added to the debt. If this is necessary, the School Governors may seek to reclaim these costs and any outstanding debt through the Small Claims Court. If parents fall into debt more than 3 times in a term the school reserves the right to refuse to provide meals for the rest of the term.

If any monies are outstanding at the end of the academic year, the academy reserves the right to charge an administration fee for time taken to recoup this outstanding debt, as well as claiming the money owed through the Small Claims Court.

We acknowledge that on occasion, families have financial difficulties and in these proven circumstances, the school will work hard with the family to agree a solution which is not to the detriment of the child. In the event of a child leaving Norwich Road Academy with an outstanding debt, the Governing Body will need to consider what further steps to take which may include contacting the receiving school to share concerns.

The aim of the academy's lunch money policy is to minimise the opportunity for debt balances to build up. This impacts on the academy budget and can incur costs for both parties, including referral to the Trust solicitors. The academy does however, reserve the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding school meal debts and inform the local authority that a child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

All Write-offs of outstanding debt must be approved by the Trust Chief Finance Officer, following submission of details of the debt by the Principal, together with reasons for no further action being taken.

APPENDIX 1

Example – Letter 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)

According to the academy's financial records, you have not paid dinner money for your child (pupil name) in Class: xx. As at xx/xx/xx your account is showing a debt of £xx. We appreciate that this may be an oversight but would politely request that this be given your prompt attention.

Until the account is up to date, you must provide your child with a packed lunch. Alternatively, your child will be provided with a sandwich and a drink only at a cost of XX. This is to ensure that they do not go hungry and the debt does not unnecessarily increase.

In order that the academy's budget is not used to clear lunch debt, please make arrangements for the outstanding money to be paid immediately. Once you have cleared the current debt I should be grateful if you could ensure that you monitor your account to keep it in credit. The current cost of a school meal is £x per day or £x per week.

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 Norfolk County Council website or in the academy office, if you do not have access to the Internet:

www.norfolk.gov.uk/education-and-learning/schools/school-meals-and-milk

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

Principal

APPENDIX 2

Example Letter 2

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 am writing regarding the current level of outstanding school meal debt that is showing on your account. Despite previous correspondences and messages, the debt for your child xx in Class xx is still outstanding and increasing. The academy's records show that as at xx/xx/xx your account is £x in debt. The current cost of a school meal is £x per day or £x per week.

I would ask that you make arrangements, to clear this debt immediately and take steps to ensure your account is kept in credit in the future. We are unable to provide any additional meals.

If you think you may qualify for Free School Meals, please contact the academy 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 Norfolk County Council website or in the academy office, if you do not have access to the Internet.

www.norfolk.gov.uk/education-and-learning/schools/school-meals-and-milk

Since the academy has to fund all school meal debts from its budget, it is essential that all payments are up to date so that the quality of the service provided to all pupils is maintained. Unfortunately, if the debt is not cleared by xxxxx a school meal will no longer be provided to your child and you must make your own arrangements for your child's lunch.

The academy reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the outstanding debt and to inform the local authority that your child is not being provided with a suitable meal at lunch time.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or you feel that we can help in some way, please contact the academy office immediately so that this matter can be resolved.

Yours sincerely

Principal