

Dinner Money and Clubs Policy Version 2

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Name of Responsible Board/Committee	Finance, Audit and Risk Committee
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that the Brighter Futures Learning Partnership Trust (BFLPT) maintains and develops systems of financial control which conform with the requirements both of propriety and of good financial management. It is essential that these systems operate properly to meet the requirements of our funding agreement with the Secretary of State.

The Trust must comply with the principles of financial control outlined in the guidance published by the Education and Skills Funding Agency in the Academy Trust Handbook (ESFA September 2024). All members and trustees of the academy trust, all local governors, headteachers, office managers, HR Managers and finance teams have been provided with a copy of the Academy Trust Handbook (ESFA September 2024) along with a copy of this policy.

This policy has been created to assist schools within Brighter Futures Learning Partnership Trust (BFLPT) to adopt a consistent approach to debt that has been incurred by parents/carers whose children take school dinners and use school clubs. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents/carers to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

Financial Management Policy
Scheme of Delegation

PAYMENT FOR SCHOOL MEALS AND CLUBS

Payment in advance

Parents/Carers are expected to pay for school meals and clubs in advance at the start of the week or on a daily basis if this is more suitable.

Online payment systems

Schools within the Trust operate online payment systems. Parents/Carers are expected to use these systems to pay for school meals and clubs.

Parents/Carers must contact the school immediately if they are having difficulties accessing their online account.

Cash will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances and at the discretion of the school.

Refunds

Dinner money refunds may only be given at the end of a term or when a child is leaving the school and only if there are no other debts associated with the student (clubs, trips etc).

Packed lunches

If a child forgets their packed lunch, a school meal may be provided at the discretion of the school. Parents/Carers will be contacted, and the meal must be paid for the following day (this does not apply to children who qualify for Free School Meals).

DEBT POLICY

We request that all parents/carers give this policy their full support. If debts are incurred, the school will have to cover the cost of the meals taken and club services used. This will mean that money which should be spent on children's education has to be used for debts incurred by parents.

No debt policy

Brighter Futures Learning Partnership Trust operates a strict **NO DEBT** policy relating to school dinners and clubs.

Accounts in arrears

It is the responsibility of parents/carers to ensure their child has sufficient funds on their account to pay for school dinners and clubs. Children may not be provided with a school dinner unless it is paid for in advance.

Contacting parents/carers

Parents/Carers who incur debts will be contacted by the school. If the debt is not cleared, they will be informed that the school can no longer provide a school dinner and access to clubs will be restricted. Parents/Carers will be instructed to provide their child with a packed lunch until the debt is cleared.

Contacting Social Care

It is the responsibility of parents/carers to either provide their child with a packed lunch, or provide the means for their child to pay for a school meal. The school reserves the right to inform Social Care when parents/carers are not carrying out their responsibility of care.

Persistent debts

The school reserves the right to exclude children of parents/carers who persistently incur debt from receiving a school dinner or accessing school clubs.

Long-term debts

If a reasonable arrangement to clear a debt cannot be made, the school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to secure payment. Note: This may affect credit ratings.

FREE SCHOOL MEALS (FSM)

Eligibility

Your child may be eligible to receive a Free School Meal (FSM) if you receive any of the following:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit)
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit

How to apply

To apply for Free School Meals (FSM) please visit City of Doncaster Council website <https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/doitonline/free-school-meals>. Please note children will not be given a Free School Meal until confirmation of entitlement has been received from Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council.

Daily allowance

Children who are entitled to a Free School Meal have a maximum daily spend allowance equivalent to a meal deal. This is currently **£2.85** for primary schools and **£3.00** for secondary schools.

Paying for extras

Parents/Carers who wish for their child to spend more than the daily allowance are expected to pay for extras in advance.

UNIVERSAL INFANT FREE SCHOOL MEALS (UIFSM)

Eligibility

All children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 are entitled to receive a Universal Infant Free School Meal (UIFSM).

Pupil Premium funding

Even though your child is entitled to receive a UIFSM, parents/carers who receive any of the benefits listed on page three are encouraged to register for Free School Meals (FSM) with Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council. This will ensure their details are included in the information used to calculate **Pupil Premium Funding**.

This funding is used to provide resources throughout the school to support children in their education and learning journey ensuring that they achieve their full potential. If a parent/carer is entitled to receive Free School Meals but does not register their entitlement, this will impact on the amount of funding the school receives.

Dinner Money and Clubs Policy Agreed at the FAR Committee on 26 February 2025.

APPENDIX A: DEBT POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Key information

Parents/Carers will be provided with a copy of this policy when their child joins the school. Parents/Carers of existing students will be signposted to this policy using the schools preferred method of communication.

All school lunches must be paid for in advance. Parents/Carers should not expect the school to provide a school dinner if the child does not have credit on their account. Persistent defaulters may be excluded from the service at the discretion of the school.

All school clubs must be paid for in advance. Access to school clubs will be restricted if debts are not cleared. Persistent defaulters may be excluded from the service at the discretion of the school.

It is the responsibility of parents/carers to ensure all services provided by the school are paid for in advance. Non-contact by the school is not a reasonable reason for non-payment.

What happens when a child's account goes into debt

Stage 1

The school first identify a child's account is in arrears.

Process: review payment history and establish whether this is a one off.

Action: office staff send a gentle debt reminder and refer parent/carer to this policy.

Stage2

The stage 1 debt is not cleared and the child has a school lunch and/or attends a club.

Process: establish whether parent/carer has contacted the school. Is this a FSM child?

Action: office staff contact parent/carer by phone and ask them to provide their child with a packed lunch until the debt is cleared and confirm access to school clubs will also be restricted. Direct parent/carer to FSM eligibility criteria if appropriate.

Stage3

The stage 2 debt is not cleared and/or parent/carer consistently does not comply with policy.

Process: establish whether parent/carer has contacted the school.

Action: parent/carer to be contacted by Headteacher either by phone or letter (Appendix B).

IMPORTANT

The school reserves the right to exclude students from non-curriculum activities (trips, social events etc), if debts remain outstanding or if parents/carers persistently do not comply with this policy.

APPENDIX B: EXAMPLE LETTER

Dear Parent/Carer

Re: Dinner Money and Clubs Policy

Brighter Futures Learning Partnership Trust has a strict **NO DEBT** policy relating to school lunches and clubs, for all schools within the Trust.

It has been brought to my attention that despite being notified of an outstanding debt, steps have not been taken to repay the money to the school. This means that money that should be spent on children's education is being spent subsidising your debt. This is unacceptable.

Action required by you

- You must make payment immediately using the online payment system.
- If you do not have an online account set up, you must contact the school office and they will assist you with registration.
- You must provide your child with a packed lunch until the debt is cleared.

If you think you have an entitlement to Free School Meals, please visit City of Doncaster Council website <https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/doitonline/free-school-meals>. Please note children will not be given a Free School Meal until confirmation of entitlement has been received from Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council.

If you are experiencing financial difficulties, please contact the school office and we may be able to agree a repayment plan.

IMPORTANT

Failure to engage with the school to resolve this issue may result in Social Care being informed. Legal proceedings may also begin to recover the debt. This may affect your credit rating.

I do not wish for your child to permanently miss out on the benefits of a healthy school meal or the social interactions of a school club, but this is a possibility if this matter is not resolved to the satisfaction of the school.

If you would like to discuss this in person, please contact the school office and make an appointment.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

APPENDIX C: FAIR USE OF CLUBS AGREEMENT

Brighter Futures Learning Partnership Trust has a strict **NO DEBT** policy relating to the use of clubs, for all schools within the Trust.

The full policy can be found on the Trust website www.brighterfutureslpt.com/policies

Parents/carers are therefore expected to pay for services provided by school clubs **in advance** using the school online payment system.

Cash will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances and at the discretion of the school.

Agreement

I understand my child will be refused access to school clubs and I will need to make alternative arrangements if I do not follow the Trust policy.

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Parent/Carer