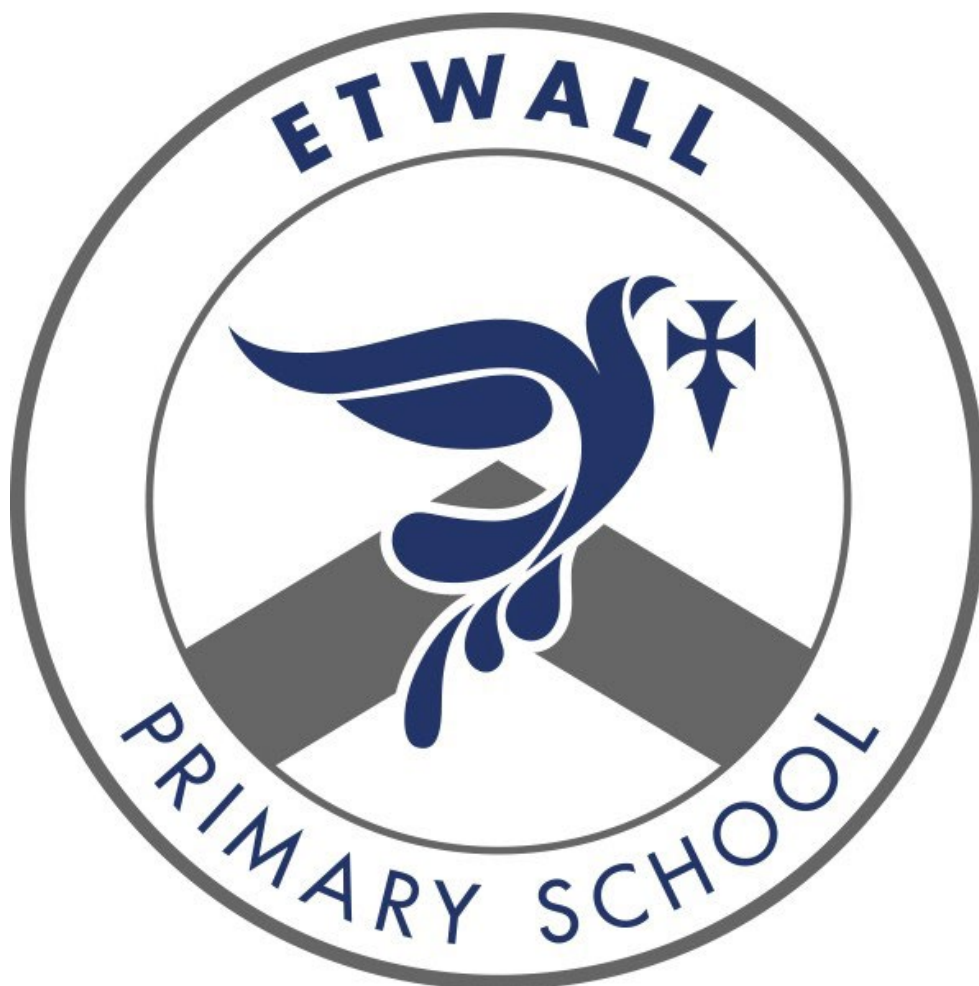


Document owner	Etwall Primary School	Approved by:	Full Governing Board
Author:	Derbyshire County Council	Chair of Governors	Zoe Poynton
Version:	September 2026	Headteacher	Sarah Bentley
This policy has been reviewed on 26/06/2026 and has been impact assessed in the light of all other school policies and the Equality Act 2010.			



Etwall Primary School

Dinner Money Policy

Background

The Etwall Primary School Debt Policy has been introduced to ensure a consistent and fair approach to managing debt incurred by parents and carers whose children receive school dinners. Since the Local Education Authority is no longer responsible for administering dinner money debt, the school must now take responsibility for pursuing any outstanding payments.

Any debts that cannot be recovered will have to be covered directly by the school budget. This reduces the funds available to support teaching and learning and ultimately affects the resources provided for all pupils.

Provision of School Meals

The School Meals Service operates like any other business, meaning that all meals must be paid for by someone. Free School Meals are available for parents and carers who meet specific criteria, including the receipt of certain benefits. Anyone who believes they may be eligible should contact the school office for further guidance.

Free School Meals are a statutory entitlement, and it is important that all eligible parents and carers apply so their child can receive a school meal each day.

Information about Free School Meal eligibility, along with an application form, can be found on the Derbyshire County Council website:

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your-child-at-school/meals/school-meals/free-school-meals.aspx>

If a child's entitlement to Free School Meals ends, or if parents' or carers' personal circumstances change, it is the responsibility of the parent/carer to provide a packed lunch or to send payment in advance for a school meal.

Cost of School Meals

School meals are available at a cost of £3.25 per day, or free of charge for children who are entitled to Free School Meals. All school meals must be paid for in advance.

If the price of school meals changes, parents and carers will be notified during the term before the new price takes effect, provided the school receives this information in sufficient time.

Payment for School Meals

Parents & Carers should use Arbor to pay for all school dinners. Each parent or carer can have their own Arbor account, allowing more than one person to make payments if needed. Arbor accounts are created by the school office when your child joins Etwall Primary School.

All payments must be made in advance. If parents & carers experience any difficulties with their account, they should contact the school office for assistance.

Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM)

Universal Infant Free School Meals were introduced by a previous government, providing all children in Reception, Year 1, and Year 2 with a free hot meal

Management of School Meal Debts

To ensure the school's budget is not negatively impacted by unpaid dinner money, the Governors believe the fairest approach for all families is to adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards school meal debt. While this may seem strict to some parents and carers, it is essential that the school's funds are used to benefit all pupils, not just a small number.

If a child takes a school meal that has not been paid for, a quick debt reminder will be sent to the parent or carer via Arbor on the same day.

At the end of the week, if a child still owes the equivalent of fewer than five school meals, a gentle reminder will be sent via Arbor.

If a child continues to take meals without payment, the school will contact the parent or carer directly to determine whether the child may be entitled to Free School Meals or whether the family is experiencing financial hardship. In such cases, parents and carers will be encouraged to apply for Free School Meals or to speak confidentially with the school's Support Worker or the Headteacher for support.

School meal debt procedure

Debt Level	Trigger	School Action	Communication Sent	Meal Provided
1-4 meals per child	First meal not paid for in advance	Quick reminder message to be sent on Arbor	Message 1 (Appendix A)	Hot meal provided if a packed lunch is not sent.
1-4 meals per child	If the above debt has not been paid in one week	Debt reminder message to be sent on Arbor	Message 2 (Appendix B)	Hot meal provided if a packed lunch is not sent.
5 meals per child or 10 meals per	Debt exceeds this threshold	Parents/carers asked to provide a packed lunch. School checks parent has received the letter and is taking steps to pay.	Letter 1 (Appendix C)	Hot meal provided if a packed lunch is not sent
15 meals per child or family	No attempt to clear the debt; debt continues to increase	School contacts parent/carers to check FSM eligibility or hardship; support is offered if needed.	Letter 2 (Appendix D)	Hot meal or simplified meal depending on circumstances
15+ meals (continued debt)	Debt remains unpaid after Letters 1 and 2	School advises that meals cannot be provided without payment or confirmed FSM entitlement; Early Help/referral offered where appropriate.	Letter 3 (Appendix E)	Simplified meal: sandwich, fruit, and water until receipt of letters is confirmed.

Separated Parents

If parents are separated and dinner money debt occurs, both parents/carers will be informed of the amount owed. They will also be advised that:

- A packed lunch must be provided if the outstanding balance is more than the cost of five school meals.
- School meals will not be provided if the debt exceeds the cost of fifteen school meals.

If parents/carers wish their child to continue receiving school meals, they must begin making payments. Any arrangements to recover money from the other parent are their responsibility.

The school is unable to mediate or become involved in disputes between parents regarding payment.

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Debts

At each governors meeting where finance is discussed, the Headteacher will provide Governors with an update on all outstanding dinner money debt and the current actions being taken to address it. The aim of the school's dinner money policy is to prevent debt from accumulating and to avoid the need for costly referrals to the school's solicitors. However, the school reserves the right to initiate legal proceedings to recover unpaid meal debts and to inform the local authority if a child is not being provided with an appropriate lunch.

Any debt that the school proposes to write off must be submitted to the Governing Body by the Headteacher, along with an explanation of why no further action is possible. All write-offs require Governor's formal approval.

APPENDIX A – Arbor Quick Reminder Message

Dear [Parent/Carer],

I am writing to remind you that, according to our records, there is an outstanding balance on your child's Arbor account.

As of [date], the outstanding balance for School Meals at Etwall Primary School is £[amount] for your child, [child's name].

We kindly ask that you arrange payment as soon as possible by logging into your Arbor account.

You can check your account balance at any time by logging into Arbor.

If you have any questions about these arrears, or if you are experiencing difficulty making a payment, please contact the school office so we can discuss the matter with you.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

APPENDIX B – Arbor Debt Reminder Message

Dear [Parent/Carer],

Pupil: [Name]

Class: [Class]

I am writing to inform you that, according to our records, there is an outstanding balance on your child's dinner money account. To ensure your child can continue receiving school lunches, it is important that the account remains in credit.

As of [date], the outstanding balance for [Name], Class [Class], is £[balance].

Please arrange payment as soon as possible using Arbor, our secure online payment system, by logging in with the details previously provided.

You may check your account balance at any time through your Arbor account.

Unpaid dinner money impacts the quality and sustainability of the school meals service. We therefore ask that all accounts are kept up to date. Once the outstanding balance has been cleared, please ensure the account remains in credit for future meals.

If you have any questions about this balance, or if you are experiencing difficulty making payment, please contact the school office so that we can support you.

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher

Appendix C – Letter 1 (Debt Equivalent to 5–10 School Meals per Child/Family)

Parent/Carer of [Pupil Name]

[Address Line 1]

[Address Line 2]

[Address Line 3]

[Postcode]

Date: [DD/MM/YY]

Dear [Parent/Carer],

School Meals for [Pupil Name]

Following a review of our dinner money records for [Pupil Name], we note that there is an outstanding balance of £[amount] on Arbor, which represents payment for [number] school meals.

We kindly request that this amount is paid as soon as possible using Arbor, our secure online payment system, by logging in with the details previously provided. In the meantime, please provide your child with a packed lunch to prevent the debt from increasing further.

If you believe you may be eligible for Free School Meals, further information is available via the link below:

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your-child-at-school/meals/school-meals/free-school-meals.aspx>

If you would like to discuss this balance or require any support, please do not hesitate to contact the school office at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Bentley

Headteacher

Appendix D – Letter 2 (Debt Exceeding 15 School Meals or After Previous Reminder)

Parent/Carer of [Pupil Name]

[Address Line 1]

[Address Line 2]

[Address Line 3]

[Postcode]

Date: [DD/MM/YY]

Dear [Parent/Carer],

School Meals for [Pupil Name]

Our financial records show that no dinner money payments have been received for [Pupil Name], Class [Class], since [date]. As of [date], the outstanding balance on your Arbor account is £[amount] for meals already taken.

Please make arrangements to pay this amount immediately using Arbor, our secure online payment system, by logging in with the details previously provided. Once the debt has been cleared, please ensure that the account remains in credit so that your child can continue to receive school meals.

The current cost of a school meal is £[x.xx] per day or £[x.xx] per week (prices from September 2026). Any meals missed due to absence or illness are automatically credited.

Until the outstanding balance is cleared, we must ask that you provide your child with a packed lunch, as the school is not obliged to provide meals without advance payment.

If you believe you may be eligible for Free School Meals, please contact the school office. Free School Meals are a statutory entitlement, and we encourage all eligible families to apply.

Further information and an online application form can be found here:

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your-child-at-school/meals/school-meals/free-school-meals.aspx>

If you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter further, please contact the school office.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Bentley

Headteacher

Appendix E – Letter 3 (Final Notice for Outstanding Dinner Money Debt)

Parent/Carer of [Pupil Name]

[Address Line 1]

[Address Line 2]

[Address Line 3]

[Postcode]

Date: [DD/MM/YY]

Dear [Parent/Carer],

School Meals for [Pupil Name]

I am writing regarding the outstanding school meal debt currently showing on your Arbor account. Despite previous letters and reminder messages, the balance for [Pupil Name], Class [Class], remains unpaid.

As of [date], our records show an outstanding amount of £[amount].

The current cost of a school meal is £[x.xx] per day or £[x.xx] per week (prices as of September 2026).

We must ask that you clear this debt immediately and ensure the account remains in credit in future so that your child can continue to access school meals. Please make arrangements to pay this amount immediately using Arbor, our secure online payment system, by logging in with the details previously provided

If you believe you may be eligible for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for advice. Free School Meals are a statutory entitlement, and if you qualify, your child will receive a school meal each day.

You can apply online, or access further information at:

<https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your-child-at-school/meals/school-meals/free-school-meals.aspx>

As the school must fund unpaid dinner money debts from its own budget, it is essential that all accounts remain up to date to protect the quality of the meals service for every pupil.

Unfortunately, if the debt has not been cleared by [date], we will no longer be able to provide a school meal for your child, and you will need to make alternative arrangements for their lunch.

Please note that the school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover outstanding debt, and to inform the local authority safeguarding team if a child is not being provided with an appropriate meal at lunchtime.

If you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter, please contact the school office immediately so that we can work with you to resolve the issue.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Bentley

Headteacher