John Burns Primary School

School Dinner Money Policy 2026

John Burns Primary School
Dinner Money Policy

Version History		
Version	**Date**	**Detail**
2.0	January 20	Approved by Governors
3.0	January 21	Review Date: January 22
4.0	January 22	Review Date: January 23
5.0	January 23	Review Date: January 24
6.0	January 24	Review Date: January 25
7.0	April 25	Review Date April 26
8.0	May 2026	Review date May 27

Background

The School Dinner Money Policy has been adopted to ensure that there is a consistent and fair approach to the payment and administration of school dinners.

The school is accountable for the administration of dinner money arrears. The responsibility falls on the school to pursue instances of non-payment. Arrears for school dinners directly impacts the school and its budget. This can reduce the amount of money that the school has to provide education for its pupils.

Provision of School Meals

The school's meal service is no different to any other business in that meals have to be paid for. The school's meal service is provided by Harrison's Catering Services. The school meals run a three week cycle and the menu changes three times a year for the autumn, spring and summer terms.

The menu is displayed on the school website and can be downloaded; https://www.johnburns.wandsworth.sch.uk/School-Meals
There are also regular 'special days' to celebrate events and add further variety to the food on offer. Parents are offered the opportunity for their child to receive a school meal on these days provided payment is made in advance. Timescales for payment need to be followed to allow sufficient time for the planning and ordering of food for the event.

If your child pays for school meals and has paid in advance for a meal and has an educational visit or trip, then a packed lunch can be ordered and prepared for your child by the school. Alternatively, any parent wishing to provide a packed lunch from home for the day of an educational visit or trip, will have their school meal payment credited to their account.

Any child who has paid school meals and is absent from school will have the daily rate credited to their school meal account. This does not apply to children entitled to Free School Meals or Universal Free School Meals.

Universal Free School Meals

All pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 are entitled to the fully-funded Government Universal Free School Meal. Parents are encouraged to take advantage of this offer and very few children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 opt to have a packed lunch brought in from home. If a parent wishes for their child to bring in a packed lunch from home, then the parent must advise the school office in writing.

Meal patterns for Universal Free School Meals are set at the beginning of each half term as either a packed lunch or school meal. The patterns cannot be mixed, for example, packed lunch for part of the week and a school meal for the other part of the week or for one particular day. This applies even if your child is entitled to a Free School Meal.

Since September 2023 pupils in KS2 (Year 3,4,5 and 6) have been entitled to Government funded Universal Free School Meals. It has been announced that UFSM will continue for the academic year 2026/27.

It is important to note that **Nursery aged children** in Early Years **are not included in the Government's Universal Free School Meal funding**. Children in this year group need to be entitled to Free School Meals otherwise all meals must be paid for.

Any parent qualifying for Free School Meals

Any parent eligible and meeting certain criteria, including the receipt of state benefits, may be entitled to a Free School Meal. 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.

Information on the entitlement to Free School Meals and an application form can be obtained from the school office. The school office, once in receipt of a Free School Meal application, will check your eligibility for Free School Meals. Any school meal taken must be paid for in full until confirmation is received that there is an entitlement to Free School Meals. Free School Meal eligibility cannot be backdated.

Meal Patterns

Meal patterns are set at the beginning of each half term as either a packed lunch or school meal. The patterns cannot be mixed. For example, a child cannot have a packed lunch for part of the week and a school meal for the other part of the week or for one particular day, even if your child is entitled to a Free School Meal.

On occasion, particularly in the autumn term, parents may want their child/ren to try a hot school meal at the beginning of the half term instead of bringing a packed lunch. This should be organised through the school office and unless eligible for UFSM the meal paid for in advance. A decision should then be made whether the child/ren continue for the rest of the half term to bring in a packed lunch or a school meal. This must be notified in writing to the school office and agreed by the school. Children may then swap over to a packed lunch or a school meal at the beginning of the next half term.

The School would encourage parents to take advantage of the Governments UFSM initiative and for their child/ren to receive a school meal.

Payment for School Meals

For pupils not entitled to UFSM's the school meal pricing is available from the school office or on the school website: https://www.johnburns.wandsworth.sch.uk/School-Meals
School meals **must** be paid **half termly in advance** by direct bank transfer to the school bank account. Any revision to the school meal prices will be notified to parents/carers the term prior to the new charge taking effect.

Please make payment direct to the School's bank account by bank transfer. Meals are payable in advance half termly and should be paid before the commencement of the next half term. You will be notified of the half termly amount due and the due by date by the school office and through communication in the school newsletter. If payment is not made by the due date you must send your child to school with a packed lunch, which will continue for the whole half term. The school is not able to wait for payment once a new half term has started.

No school meal payment is required for children whose family is in receipt of Free School Meals entitlement or UIFSM (KS1) entitlement or UFSM (KS2).

Refunds for School Meals

If your child leaves the school prior to the end of a half term and you have paid in advance for a school meal, then the school will be able to refund payments made for any meals not taken.

Management of School Meal Arrears

To ensure that the school's budget is not adversely affected by the cost of School meal arrears the Governors consider that the fairest system to all families is to pursue a **'Zero Tolerance'** approach towards school meal debt. This may appear harsh to some parents, but it is important that the school budget does not get used to fund school dinner arrears.

If a child arrives at school without a packed lunch or payment has not been received for a school meal, the school will telephone, and/or email the parent/carer in the first instance to establish if alternative arrangements have been made.

When a parent has failed to make a payment for a school meal the school may allow a meal to be provided where it is felt that this is a temporary situation. For example, lost or forgotten packed lunch or a temporary hardship. Any alternative arrangements and the period of time for these alternate arrangements, will be at the discretion of the Headteacher. Should this be the case details will be recorded in writing and a record maintained and monitored of this arrangement. This is evidenced required for financial auditing purposes.

If a child takes a school meal which has not been paid for, a telephone call will be made and/or an email detailing how much is owed will be notified to the parent/carer requesting immediate payment directly to the school's bank account. Prompt action will be taken to address any arrears at an early stage in order to prevent debt amassing.

Monitoring and Recovery of School Meal Arrears

The Headteacher and School Business Manager report to the Governing Body/Resources and Personnel Committee on details of any outstanding dinner money arrears and the current position with regard to such debt.

The aim of the School Dinner Money Policy is to minimise the opportunity for arrears to build up. If debts are incurred then the school budget has to pay for them. This means that money which should be spent on the children's education is used to pay for debts incurred by parents. If a parent repeatedly fails to provide a packed lunch, or sufficient monies to cover the cost of school meals, there may be a referral to Social Services as this has an effect on a pupil's welfare. Correspondence, including letters of non-payment for school meals, may be passed onto other agencies. Copies of non-payment school meal letters and reminders are held on pupil registration files.

Outstanding debt will be brought to the attention of the school governors. Where no attempt is made to clear the debt, the school will follow the procedure of the Schools Debt Recovery Policy.

Signed: _____ Date:_____

Next Review: Summer 2027