

Rainow Primary School

Caring, Learning, Achieving.

PROVISION OF MEALS & REFRESHMENTS POLICY & PROTOCOL

PROTOCOL FOR NON PAYMENT OF SCHOOL MEALS (PAID MEALS)

This is a protocol to cover circumstances where parents' have not paid for their children's' school meals for a period of time.

The school should identify non-payment and investigate the reason for non-payment and enquire whether the family is eligible to receive Free School Meals. If so, the parents should be advised to make an application via the Free School Meals Helpline, telephone number – **0300 123 5012**. If the pupils are entitled to free school meals the application will **not** be backdated. The school needs to ascertain the first day of eligibility and still pursue any outstanding debt from the parents.

If the school is concerned about the wellbeing/welfare of the pupil(s) at any stage in this process, they should contact the appropriate Cheshire East Council services for advice and guidance contact details are:

Crewe -01270 375277

Wilmslow -01625 374782

N.B. – these services are not involved in the procedures for the recovering of debt

Throughout any stage of these processes, schools may agree a payment by instalment process with the parents that would negate the need for further action to be taken. Should that agreement then break down, the Protocol would be reintroduced.

It may be necessary to manage the situation more closely in schools where more than one child from the same family receives school meals (where a substantial debt can accumulate quickly), and where there is a known history of bad debt. Where more stringent procedures than those described here are currently in use there is no intention that those procedures be relaxed.

Protocol to be followed:-

- **Step 1. Parent fails to pay for a pupil's school meal for a period of three weeks.**
A reminder letter on school headed notepaper should be sent to the parents at the end of the first week for which income has not been received. Similar letters should be sent on a weekly basis for three weeks. The third letter should state that provision of school meals may be withdrawn if no payment is forthcoming.
- **Step 2. Parent fails to pay for pupil's school meal and this continues for a 4 week period**
 - a) School will continue to ask parent for payment during the third week.
 - b) After 4 weeks, the school will send a letter on school headed paper (to be sent as soon as possible during the fifth week without payment) to the parent requesting that payment is made forthwith and within 7 days. **The letter must also state that if payment is not made then meals will not be provided to their child/children from the start of the following week and that the parent must make alternative lunchtime arrangements e.g. provision of a packed lunch.**

NB Schools should not continue to provide meals on the basis that payment has been promised. **See comments under step 5.**

- **Step 3. Parent continues not to pay for school meals – Meals have now been provided for five weeks without payment.**
 - a) Under these circumstances, meals would have continued to have been provided for the 5 week period and the debt will be mounting per child – with a family the debt could be significantly more.
 - b) The deadline stated in the second letter has now expired and if the parent has not paid, alternative arrangements should now be in place for the pupil's lunch. If alternative arrangements are not in place on the first day of the week the school need to remind the parents to supply a packed lunch.

 - **Step 4. Parent continues not to pay for pupil's school meal beyond the 5 week period and after the second letter has been sent**
 - a) If, after exhaustive efforts, the school is not able to recover the debt that mounted up prior to meals being stopped, the school would request an external invoice to be raised.

 - **The school should also ensure that a further letter on school headed paper is attached to the invoice stating that if a packed lunch is NOT provided by the Parents, the matter may be referred to Cheshire East Council Agencies by the school should the situation continue for a further week.**
- c) If the debt continues, a schedule of 'bad debts' may appear and if non-payment is confirmed, the school will need to decide whether to 'write-off' the debt **(they would stand the cost)** – or whether to ask CEC to take legal proceedings against the parents.

**CAREFUL CONSIDERATION BY THE GOVERNING BODY WOULD NEED
TO BE GIVEN TO THIS BEFORE REACHING SUCH A DECISION**