



# School Charges Arrears Policy

Signed:

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## School Charges Arrears Policy

This Policy recognises the difficulties placed on Braeburn Primary & Nursery Academy in balancing the social welfare of pupils to provide nourishing and healthy hot meals, with the management of the school budget. This policy also covers other chargeable services that Braeburn Primary & Nursery Academy provides, including but not limited to breakfast club and additional nursery sessions.

If arrears are incurred, then the school budget has to pay for them. This means that money, which should be spent on children's education, is used to pay for debts incurred by parents/carers. This is unacceptable and we request that all parents/carers give this policy their full support.

### School dinner arrears

We ask that each child's dinner money account is paid in advance via ParentPay or by card payment to the school office. We try to be a cashless school, but if you have no other cashless method of making payment, please speak to the school office about paying in cash. If the dinner money account is not in credit the child will be provided with a school meal in good faith and on the assumption that payment will be made by the next day.

Parents/carers whose child takes a school lunch must pay the relevant cost stated by the schools catering supplier. The charges at the time of writing the policy are £2.70 per day (£2.00 in nursery). Pupils may be eligible for free school meals where a parent / carer is in receipt of the following:

- Universal Credit, (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods)
- Child Tax Credit, provided you are also not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual household gross income that does not exceed £16,190 (as assessed by HMRC)
- 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 guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- A run-on of Working Tax Credit – paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

### How can I find out if my child is eligible for free school meals?

The school can apply on your behalf with a few basic personal details. We use a service called Online Free School Meals <https://apply.cloudforedu.org.uk/> to process the applications, which automatically rechecks your eligibility periodically and update us via email if your status should change. Please contact the school office if you have not already given consent for us to apply, and you feel that you may be eligible. All of our admission booklets contain a consent form for this service, so if you completed this at admission, we will have you on the service already.

### **Will my child be able to have school dinners if I owe money?**

If the arrears reach £10 or more, you will be sent a text advising you that you need to settle the balance in order for your child to continue ordering school lunches. If you are unable to make payment and keep your account in credit, we will politely request that you provide a packed lunch until you can settle the account. This is to ensure the debt does not become too unmanageable for you, and to protect the school against large debts which need to be offset against the school budget.

### **What if I owe money for breakfast club?**

The same principle applies to booking for breakfast club. Breakfast club is currently charged at £2 per day and should be booked and paid for in advance. Should you build up arrears of over £10, you will be contacted to request that this is settled. The school reserves the right to cancel your booking if you do not keep your account in credit. This is to ensure the debt does not become too unmanageable for you, and to protect the school against large debts which need to be offset against the school budget.

### **What if I owe money for additional nursery sessions?**

Nursery fees are charged in advance half termly at Braeburn, based on the number of additional sessions you request (a session is a morning or an afternoon, and an extra day is therefore 2 sessions). When requesting additional sessions you are committing to pay for the place your child will take. We recognise that this can be a lot of money to pay up front, and we therefore offer the chance to pay by instalments through the half term. We request that your half termly balance is settled by the last week of each half term, before the next block of sessions are charged for. If you are unable to do maintain these payments, you may be politely advised that your additional sessions will be withdrawn for the following half term. This is to ensure the debt does not become too unmanageable for you, and to protect the school against large debts which need to be offset against the school budget.

### **Can I come and discuss my arrears with anyone in school?**

Yes, you are welcome to arrange to meet with our School Business Partner who can sensitively discuss your arrears, and agree an affordable repayment plan with you. A written agreement will be made between yourself and the school, and as long as payments are made in line with that agreement, no further action will be taken.

### **I owe a large sum of money from previous school years, do I still need to pay this?**

Yes, you will need to make every effort to repay any money owed to the school, even if it was from earlier school years, including outstanding nursery fees. This is because any debts not paid by parents directly comes from the school budget, which impacts on the school's ability to pay for staff and learning resources for your children in the future.

### **My circumstances have changed and I now get free school meals, so why do I have dinner arrears?**

If your circumstances have changed and you previously paid for meals, but were in arrears before the entitlement to free school meals began, then you will still owe that money to the school. Free school meal entitlement will not wipe out previously incurred debts unfortunately. However, if you need to have a sensitive discussion about how this can be done in an affordable way, please contact the School Business Partner.

## **What do I do if I think a mistake has been made on my account and I don't believe I owe any money?**

In the first instance we would ask that you contact the school office and alert them to the fact that you believe there is an error on your account. The school office will investigate this and give you an outcome. Common examples of errors include a child being mistakenly charged for a school dinner when they bring a daily packed lunch. This can arise through human error when children are selecting their lunch options on the tablet in the classroom.

## **How will you tell parents if money is owed?**

We will use a range of communication methods to let parents know that they owe money to the school, and what this is for.

1. Reminders will be sent to parents via ParentPay on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday advising if there are arrears on the account.
2. On a Monday, individual arrears balances are monitored in more detail and where there have been no payments made, or the arrears have increased in the previous week, further contact will be made via a formal reminder letter (letter 1) requesting that the balance is brought up to date.
3. Where a reminder letter (letter 1) has been sent and no payment has been made by the following Monday, a phone call home will be made by the School Business Partner to discuss the arrears.
4. A further warning letter (letter 2) will be issued where there have been no attempts to make payment or negotiate a repayment plan, following the weekly ParentPay reminders, letter 1 and a phone call. This letter requests immediate payment or agreement of a repayment plan, in order to avoid escalation to the Trust for further enforcement action.
5. For large and/or persistent debts, you may be invited to a meeting with the School Business Partner and Headteacher / Head of School to discuss a solution.
6. Further reminders, phone calls and letters will be issued until a repayment plan has been agreed / full repayment has been made.
7. Once all attempts to collect the outstanding dinner money have been exhausted and no payment plan or meeting with the parents/carers has been made the matter should be referred to the Finance Team at Ebor Academy Trust and the decision will be made as to whether legal action will be taken to recover the outstanding debt. The following details need to be provided:
  - School Name
  - Pupil Name (in full)
  - Parents/Guardian name and address
  - Arrears to be recovered
  - Specific dates to which the arrears relate
  - Statement printed out from ParentPay software, with details of meals taken
  - Copy of correspondence sent to parents/carers
8. Where a pupil(s) transfer to another school within the Local Authority, the school may contact the new school to advise them that there are outstanding arrears.