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Can secondary pupils with a zero or negative balance on their school meal account access a school meal? If they can access school meal, what is the process for doing so? Does this accrue debt to the family?

If they have a zero balance they would report to the school office. The HT at each school has discretion for offering the hospitality card to access school meals.

Do pupils with a zero or negative balance on their school meal account have any restrictions placed on what they can eat either at lunchtime or during morning break?

As above.

Does debt on the school meal system get referred to the council for debt collection? Does the Council use external debt agencies or sheriff officers to collect school meal debt?

The school will send out debt collection letters to families, no external company is used.

Do you use a cashless payment system for school meals in a) Primary and b) Secondary school? If so, which system is used?

For primary schools the preferred method is ParentPay, details of which are publicly available on the Council website:

<https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/schools-learning/online-payments-schools-early-years/1>

For secondary schools, ParentPay is used for topping balances.

There is also a second system used for secondary schools. However, we are unable to provide you with details of this. In line with advice from GovCerUK, we do not provide information relating to hardware, software and systems, where it is not published on the Council website, and therefore, unfortunately, it is not possible to provide you with the information you have requested on this occasion.

Under the terms of the legislation, a request for information can be refused where one or more exemptions listed in the legislation apply. In this instance, the Council is claiming the following exemption to this part of the information that you have requested: Section 30(c) - Information is exempt if its disclosure would otherwise prejudice substantially, or be likely to prejudice substantially, the effective conduct of public affairs.

By placing information about our systems into the public domain we would potentially be putting our IT framework at risk. This would prejudice substantially the Council's ability to effectively carry out its business if its IT framework were compromised as a consequence of the disclosure of this information.

This exemption also requires the application of the public interest test to ascertain if withholding the requested information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. By providing such information about our IT services into the public domain we would potentially be putting our IT framework at risk. The public interest would not be served by the Council being subjected to the potential of Cyber attacks that could breach our security and damage our IT infrastructure.

Please note that this letter constitutes a formal refusal notice under section 16 of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002

Is school meal debt written off when a child leaves secondary school?

No, it is still shown as leavers debt.

Does school meal debt outstanding at the end of primary seven transfer to secondary school?

Funds cannot be transferred from one school account to another as they will have already been settled to the first school's bank account.

Per ParentPay FAQs <https://www.parentpay.com/parent-faqs/>

Is school meal debt written off when a child leaves the local authority or is it transferred to another local authority?

No, it is still shown as leavers debt. There is no facility for debt to be transferred to another authority.

Where a family makes a late application for free school meals does this write-off any debt that may have already accrued or does the debt have to be paid?

Free school meals (FSM) are backdated to when the pupil became eligible, meaning any debt would be written off.

If people's Universal Credit income varies from month to month does it have an effect on their free school meal entitlement? If so, what effect?

If take home pay in a Universal Credit award fluctuates each month, we will use an average over an appropriate period (normally 2 months or more) to assess if the parent/carer is still eligible for FSM.

If take home pay is over the limit of £625 per month and it appears that income will continue to be over £625 per month, we will cancel the FSM award. The parent/carer can reapply for FSM if their take home pay falls below £625 per month in future.