



Family Dining Policy 2025-26

Person responsible for policy	SBM
Approved	David McPhee
Review Date	27/03/2025

Contents

1) Background.....	2
2) Family Dining.....	2
3) Family Dining Menu.....	3
4) Food Allergies.....	3
5) Other medical conditions impacting Family Dining.....	3
6) Family Dining Charges.....	3
7) Payment Method - Direct Debit Instruction (DDI).....	4
8) Payment Method - Parentmail.....	5
9) Financial Difficulties.....	6
10) Overdue Debts.....	6
11) Complaints or Appeals.....	7
12) Confidentiality.....	7
13) Review.....	7

1) Background

Family Dining is an important part of the Swan School life. The aim is to recreate a ‘family’ atmosphere with students and teachers, where everyone is encouraged to engage in conversation and take responsibility for different aspects of the service, for example laying the table, serving food, or tidying the table at the end of the meal.

We are committed to the benefits which this format of dining brings:

- It helps model the importance of a healthy diet and nutrition.
- It builds community as opposed to a ‘grab and go’ approach of eating on the move.
- It creates shared experiences - all students share a communal meal.
- It is inclusive because it is impossible to tell who receives free school meals.
- It helps students develop conversational/social skills.
- It develops responsibility.
- It prevents long lunch queues which encourage some students to skip lunch.
- It contributes greatly to reduced rubbish and mess in our school buildings and around our grounds.

The cost of lunch is shown on the [Payment Collection Schedule](#) for the current school year. The Swan School has done considerable work looking at the cost of Family Dining. Additionally, research shows that fewer than 2% of packed lunches meet the School Food Standards and so offer a far less nutritious option than Family Dining for the vast majority of students.

2) Family Dining

All children in Year 7 to Year 11 are required to take part in Family Dining unless there are special considerations (see sections 4 and 5).

3) Family Dining Menu

The Family Dining menu covers a 2 week period. The menu includes two options for each day - the main option, and a simple second option (such as jacket potato or pasta with a sauce). The menu is changed 3 times a year. A link to the menu is displayed on the school website.

In advance of a change in menu, the school will send a form to students for them to choose their preferred meal for each day of the 2 week period. Parents receive notification of this via email and the Parent Bulletin, giving them the opportunity to be involved in their child's decision making.

Forms must be submitted using the student's school email address and students who do not complete the form by the deadline will be allocated the main option. Students who join mid-cycle will be allocated the main option for the remainder of that cycle.

4) Food Allergies

If a child has food allergies, their parents are responsible for notifying both the School and the school caterers about the allergy. The School caterers will contact the parents to gather more information about the allergy, which may include letters from the child's doctor about the allergies.

In the majority of cases the caterers will be able to provide a special meal that takes into account the child's allergies. The child is responsible for collecting this special meal every mealtime from the counter. Normal Family Dining charges will apply.

In very rare cases, the caterers are not able to provide a meal that safely takes into account the allergies. In these circumstances, the Headteacher will authorise a packed lunch pass, and the child will be allowed to bring in a packed lunch which is eaten with other children in Family Dining. In these cases there will be no charge for Family Dining.

5) Other medical conditions impacting Family Dining

In very rare cases a child has a medical condition which impacts their ability to take part in Family Dining. Parents should initially contact their child's Head of Year with details of the condition and relevant doctors' letters. It is a requirement that each doctor's letter/medical certificate sets out a clear diagnosis of the relevant condition, illness, disease, etc.

The Headteacher is ultimately responsible for deciding if the medical condition means that the child cannot eat the Family Dining lunch and therefore should be issued with a packed lunch pass. The School reserves the right to review lunch passes periodically and request up to date doctors' letters.

6) Family Dining Charges

We ask parents whose children do not receive free school meals to pay for Family Dining lunches by direct debit: this is the Swan School's required method of payment for Family Dining and provides a convenient way for parents to pay for each term's lunches on a monthly basis. If parents feel unable to sign up for payments via direct debit, they must contact the Finance

department to discuss this. Please note that we only make exceptions in special circumstances as direct debit greatly reduces the administrative burden on the School and the organisational burden on parents.

Where parents are separated, the School considers that they have equal responsibility for lunch payments, unless there are court orders in place to the contrary. Parents are responsible for notifying the School of such circumstances.

Parents are expected to prioritise payments for Family Dining lunches over payments for snacks, payments for non-essential school trips and payments for non-essential/optional activities.

Students are only charged for Family Dining lunches when they are in school. Students who are absent from school are not charged. The attendance registers taken after lunch are used to determine which children were in school at lunchtime. Occasionally this may result in errors if the child eats lunch at home and then returns to school in time for the afternoon registers. In these circumstances, parents should notify the School Office who will adjust the charges.

Students on trips may be asked to bring packed lunch, lunch may be included in the cost of the trip, or students may be required to buy lunch themselves. The trip documentation will make it clear what the arrangements are for meals. Students on trips over lunchtime are not charged for Family Dining.

Students eligible for Free School Meals are not charged for Family Dining lunches.

During Ramadan, some students may wish to fast. We ask students to complete a form to notify us of their intention to fast. The form must be submitted with the student's school email address. Parents are informed about this process via email and the Parent Bulletin and are asked to approve their child's choice of whether to fast or not. We set a deadline for accepting submissions so that there is adequate time for the catering supplier to plan accordingly. Responses received after the deadline will result in the student being charged for Family Dining during Ramadan. This is because the School incurs the cost of providing lunch, even though the student is fasting. Fasting students are not required to go into the dining hall. Parents who wish their child to have access to the prayer room during this time are asked to complete a separate form requesting a prayer room pass for the student.

7) Payment Method - Direct Debit Instruction (DDI)

This is the Swan School's required method of payment for Family Dining and provides a convenient way for parents to pay for each term's lunches on a monthly basis.

Set up:

Through our designated Direct Debit facilitator, we provide parents with a secure online form to set up a Direct Debit Instruction (DDI) for their child. *Parents must only complete the form for the*

student to whom it applies. We send you a separate link (in a separate email) if you have other students in Years 7-11 at the Swan School.

We only require one direct debit instruction (DDI) form per student (the same bank account may be used for each student), unless:

- Parents within the same household prefer to split payments equally between two bank accounts;
- Parents are separated and share the cost of Family Dining.

In both these situations, please contact the Finance department and we will send you different custom links to the form.

We are unable to allow payments to be split over three or more bank accounts, or for payments to be split other than 50/50 due to the increased administration burden.

Parents are required to provide a valid email address when giving the Direct Debit Instructions (DDI) so that we can provide the required notices.

Notification of Payments - Advance Notices

Parents will receive Advance Notices relating to their DDI when:

- They initially sign up to pay by Direct Debit
- Changes are made to the amount
- Changes are made to the due date, not including those impacted by Bank Holidays (when collection may occur on or within three working days after the agreed date).

Parents are responsible for ensuring that they have adequate funds in their nominated bank account for each payment to be collected on its designated date.

We will send parents a monthly statement showing the total charges for a month and the amount collected that month through the direct debit collection schedule. This is for information only and no action is required by parents unless they have a query about charges/attendance.

Schedule of Payments

Payments for lunches in the 2025-26 school year will be taken on the first of the month from September to July. When the first day of a month falls on a weekend or public holiday, payments are taken on the next working day. Payment amounts are shown on the [Payment Collection Schedule](#) for the school year. Parents will be notified of payment amounts by email, during the course of the year, via advance notices.

Leavers

Parents do not need to do anything specifically for leavers: we will ensure that their accounts have a zero balance in July, through a single collection or refund. We will cancel the direct debit instruction for students who are leaving. If parents wish to do this themselves and they have more than one child at the Swan School, they should only cancel the direct debit instruction relating to the student who is leaving so as not to affect payments for the younger sibling in the next school year. Mistakes will mean a new direct debit instruction will then need to be provided for the continuing student, creating unnecessary administrative costs.

Other

Our Direct Debit facilitator meets all the legal and regulatory requirements under GDPR and the Data Protection Act.

Our Direct Debit facilitator is regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

As with all DDIs, parents/payers are protected by the [Direct Debit Guarantee](#).

The School provides responses to frequently asked questions about direct debit ([Direct Debit FAQs](#)) on the school website.

8) Payment Method - Parentmail

Parentmail is the legacy method of paying for lunches. All families are required to move to Direct Debit unless approval has been requested and given by the Finance department.

Where the Finance department has agreed that lunch payments may continue on Parentmail, parents will pay for Family Dining through the student's Lunches account on Parentmail. Please note that Family Dining lunches are not paid for through the Dinner Top-up account (which is for snacks and breakfast, and very occasionally the student's urgent stationery needs).

Parents should keep their child's Parentmail lunch account in credit at all times.

Parentmail has an automatic top-up feature for the Lunches account, which parents are encouraged to use. Additionally, an automated email reminder will be sent to parents when their child's balance falls below £15.

The school will update each student's lunch account at the end of each week with the charges for the week that has just finished.

Parents are able to reconcile charges against their child's attendance by reviewing charges by date on their Parentmail account (please refer to detailed instructions in the guide).

Parents must ensure that a leaver's Family Dining Lunches account has a zero balance.

Parentmail will continue to be used to collect payments for snacks, trips and activities.

All parents have access to Parentmail. New families will receive an email notification inviting them to set up a Parentmail account no later than the 2nd working day after their child starts at the Swan. Parents are responsible for activating their Parentmail account

The School provides a step by step guide to setting up and using Parentmail to make payments on the school website.

9) Financial Difficulties

Families experiencing financial difficulties, who are struggling to pay for Family Dining, are encouraged to apply for Free School Meals via the [form](#) on the School website, and also to let the Finance department know (email: finance@theswanschool.org.uk). The Finance department will work with the parents to put a plan in place. This may involve a repayment plan, deferred payments, etc.

In rare cases, the School may be able to offer a student discounted school meals for a limited period of time. The School reserves the right to review eligibility for discounted meals at its discretion. While we make every effort to assist families experiencing extreme financial hardship, the Swan School's decision about eligibility for discounted meals is final.

10) Overdue Debts

All parents are required to keep their child's Family Dining account in credit balance. Direct debit payment schedules have been calculated to ensure the account stays in balance. Parents paying via Parentmail are sent reminders if their balance drops below £15. This allows for the process by which lunch charges on Parentmail are updated on Friday afternoon for the week which has just ended.

The School will work with families with overdue balances to assist with applications for free school meals, set up repayment plans, etc. When a repayment plan is agreed, the School will ask parents to provide a direct debit instruction to ensure that payments are made in a timely manner.

The School reserves the right not to accept a child on a non-essential school trip or non-essential activity if they have an overdue balance. Essential school trips are ones that all students in that year group, or taking that subject are expected to take part in. Non-essential school trips/activities are ones where we do not expect all children to take part in. The decision will take into account efforts the parents are making to repay the overdue balance.

The School will not tell children that there is an overdue balance on their lunch account.

11) Complaints or Appeals

Any student or parent who is unhappy with the implementation of the Family Dining policy or who wishes to make an appeal should follow the Swan School's complaints procedure. Complaint forms are available from the School Office.

12) Confidentiality

The School will ensure that information applications are handled confidentially. For audit purposes, however, records are kept for a period of six years and will be held securely and in compliance with the Data Protection Act. The information will be made available for audit purposes.

13) Review

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.