

# *Cashless School Meals System*

## ***What is Cashless Catering?***

Cashless catering is a computerised system whereby cash payments are not made at the till in the dining hall. Spending will be recorded in the student's account by the use of biometric fingerprint recognition technology. The Live Register system allows the recognition of each individual student, holds individual cash balances, records cash spent and cash received, records where money is spent, on what food, on any specific date and time of day. Money can be put onto this system via the finance office by cheque or by the use of a cash loader in the dining hall.

The system gives the following benefits:

- Convenience of paying for the school meals. No more looking for change every morning
- Alleviates many of the associated problems with the use of cash in schools, eg, loss, theft and bullying
- Queuing times reduced through increased speed of service
- Automatic free meal allocation with the student remaining anonymous
- No loss or misuse of school dinner money in or out of school. Paying by cheque you can ensure that your child is eating on school premises and is therefore in our care
- Students acquire important life skills by using an account system and being responsible for their own account.

## ***About Biometrics***

Live Register uses a system of taking measurements to capture unique characteristics of an individual's fingerprint and stores these as a coded string of numbers. This means that an image of the fingerprint is not stored nor can it be reconstructed as an image.

Biometric fingerprint recognition technology in schools has been given the thumbs up by Becta, the DCSF and the UK Information Commissioner's Office.

The new guidance confirms that schools can legally make use of this technology to support their efficient day-to-day management and security.

See the full report at [www.becta.org.uk](http://www.becta.org.uk).

**"I have seen at first hand how well [biometric] systems work. They can speed up lunch queues, remove the need for children to carry money and take away the stigma of singling out those on free school meals. Moreover, they can enable schools to register pupils more easily as they move from class to class.**

**We give schools complete freedom to run their own affairs and I back every head teacher's right and professional judgement to choose technology to improve their day-to-day running."**

**- Jim Knight, Schools Minister - July 2007**

## ***How are the students recognised by the system and how is the card used to obtain a school meal?***

Each student will have their finger print measured (and stored as a coded string of numbers) using a scanner and will be issued with his or her own account. Using Point of Sale (PoS) terminals the cashier selects meal items on a touch sensitive screen and the student authorises the payment by placing their thumb on a scanner. For added security a Photo ID will be displayed at the point of sale in the dining hall. A display will show the student's name, value spent so far that day and the current balance held within the system.

### ***How is money entered into the system?***

- a) By **Cheque** made out to 'Mount Grace School'. The amount can cover any period – term, half term, month, week or could be a fixed monetary amount of the parents' choice. A lockable metal post box is provided in school to receive cheque payments.  
**To enable the correct identification of the student account, please write 'Catering' on the back of the cheque together with the student's full name and form group. If payment is to be shared between two students, identify both with full name and form group**
- b) By '**Cash Coins**' into the automatic cash loader located in the school dining hall which is set to accept £20, £10, £5 notes and £2, £1, 50p, 20p, 10p coins. Students identify themselves by placing their thumb on the cash loader scanner.

### ***How will the students be able to check their current balances held in the system?***

In two ways;

- a) By using the cash loader.
- b) A customer display at the point of sale will show the new cash balance when the food service has finished.

### ***If we pay for a set number of meals/days, can it be spent in one day?***

**No**, a daily 'global' spend limit of **£5 per day** will be set and automatically managed by the system. However, this may not be acceptable to all, so on request an individual limit can be set if the School is informed in writing (please refer to the enclosed 'Student Cashless Catering Form').

### ***What if the student does not hold sufficient cash balance one day to pay for a school dinner?***

No student is refused a school dinner because they have not brought their dinner money to school with them. The school will allow the student to borrow money for one day. However, just as before, the student will be expected to bring money with them the next day to repay the loan and re-credit the system by using the cash loader or by cheque payment to 'Mount Grace School' via the cheque post box within the school.

### ***What about students entitled to a 'free school meal'?***

The system works exactly the same for all students whether they pay or have free school meals. All students are issued with an account which they will be able to use in the exactly the same way. There will be no queuing to be issued with a 'free meal' ticket or having the student's name entered into the 'free meal' register at the till point.

*The amount allocated for the free school meal will be automatically added by the system to the entitled students account on a daily basis. Any 'underspend' or missed meals will be identified by the system and will not be added to the next day's balance.*

The student can also add extra cash on to his or her balance in the system by cheque or by using the cash loader. This will enable them a greater daily spend, say for breakfast, break time snacks, than simply the 'free school meal' allocation.

### ***Will students have problems in using the system?***

Some students may find it difficult to control their accounts for the first couple of weeks, but because of the daily spend limit, most learn this important life-skill very quickly and enjoy being in control of their account.

If there is any problem with the system of taking measurements to capture unique characteristics of an individual's fingerprint, a four digit pin number will be issued to the student to be used on a key pad located next to all fingerprint scanners used in the system.

### ***Will we be able to have any information on how the system is being used?***

Reports can be obtained from the system giving comprehensive information on all aspects of use for each individual student as well as each day's service.