The cashless catering system

We use Cunningham's cashless catering at the Matthew Arnold School. This system has several advantages to your child including faster service times, no need for children to bring cash into school and parental control over what children are eating. The system we use is biometric finger recognition, taking a scan that is then converted into a digital signature to identify students so there is no need for a card which could be forgotten or lost (this information cannot be used to recreate the fingerprint information at a later date). Online payments allow parents the convenience of topping up the account at a time to suit them.

How is this then used to obtain a school meal?

The student simply places his or her finger on a scanner at the point of sale; a display will show the server the student's name, class and current cash balance held within the system. The selected food items will be entered into the system from an itemised keyboard while the amount spent and the new cash balance will show on the display.

Individual account

All students have an individual account which needs to have money pre-paid to it as no cash can be accepted at the food till points.

There are four convenient ways to pay:

1. Parents can pay online at a dedicated secure website www.parentpay.com
2. Cheques can be placed into the dedicated post box outside the cafe. If using this facility please put in an envelope clearly stating the child's name and tutor group.
3. Cash payments can be made by using the automatic cash terminal outside the café.
4. PAYPOINT can also be used to top up your child's account; please ask the school for more details.

Online Payments - this process is facilitated by ParentPay

ParentPay offers you the freedom to make payments whenever and wherever you like, 24-7, safe in the knowledge that the technology used has the highest internet security available. You have a secure online account, with a unique user ID and password. You can change these to something you will easily remember and merge accounts of 2 or more children. Making a payment is easy and simple. ParentPay holds an electronic record of your payments to view at a later date. No card details are stored in any part of the system.

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Spend Limit

There is an automatic daily spend limit of £5 for all students; this can be decreased or increased for an individual student by making a written request to the school.

Accepted cash - cash terminal

The cash terminal is programmed to accept £2, £1, 50p, 20p and 10p coins and £5, £10 and £20 notes.

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

No student is refused a school dinner because he or she has not brought dinner money to school. The school will loan the student money for one day. However, the student would be expected to bring some money the next day to repay the loan and re-credit the system by using the revaluation station, with a cheque payable to 'The Matthew Arnold School' or by parents topping up online.

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

The system works exactly the same for all students whether they pay or are entitled to free school meals (FSM). All students have their own account to use in exactly the same way. The amount allocated for the FSM will be entered into the system by the software daily. The system will then allow on a daily basis the required cash amount for each individual student to be allotted to their current cash balance. Any unspent balance for the day is removed so cannot be used on subsequent days. The student can also add extra cash on to his or her balance in the system by using the revaluation station to enable a greater daily spend than allocated by their FSM allowance. The FSM allowance is used first by the system before any money that has been paid into the student's account. It is supposed to provide a meal for students so they will not be allowed to use it for only buying cakes or biscuits.

What about special dietary requirements?

Should the student have a specific food allergy, or be a diagnosed diabetic, this medical information can be coded into the system, preventing foods with allergy ingredients from being served to a particular student, by automatically locking out relevant buttons on the keyboard.

Will students have problems in using this system?

Some new 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 will enjoy being in control of their account.

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. These reports can be for a specific day or between any dates you wish; they will be dated and timed to the minute, and can be obtained from the finance department:

a) To show every item of food served and the total cost of each serving.
b) Individual payments made direct to the school by cheque or cash and manually entered into the system.
c) Each payment made by cash at the revaluation station by the student and if required, even the number of individual coins and the denomination.
d) A total overview to show the date, time and location with cost of each purchase value of all manual cheque or cash payments, value of all cash deposited in the revaluation station and current cash balance.

Data Handling

Certain data will be held on the system to enable accurate operation. This will include your child's name, class, photo, account balance and meal entitlement. This data will be handled under the guidelines of the data protection act and only used by parties directly involved with the implementation of the system.

Parental Consent

An acceptance form signed by parents is required before your child can be biometrically registered. This can be obtained from the school or by printing the form on this website.

Further enquiries

If you have any further questions or concerns regarding the new system, please contact the finance office on 01784 429676.