



27<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Dear Parents/Carers,

The Trust and our catering partner Aspens wish to inform you that effective from 4th March 2024 the meal price in all of our schools will increase from £2.40 to £2.60. At St. Bernadette's this price increase will only affect pupils in Nursery (Class 1) and Key Stage 2 (Classes 7–12) as meals remain free to those pupils in Reception and Key Stage 1 (Classes 2–6) through the Universal Infant Free School Meals Scheme, and also to those families whose children receive means-tested Free School Meals.

The challenges we are seeing in our kitchens are the same as those you are likely experiencing at home. Ingredient prices are rocketing, and energy costs are sky high. Additionally, we are funding important National Minimum Wage increases for the catering teams. Here is some background information that we would like to share with you.

As is the case for supermarkets and restaurants across the UK, we are experiencing weekly increases in the prices of food and drink, with inflation of 12.2% in September, and further inflation of 6.7% in October according to the Office of National Statistics. Supply volumes have dropped, due to factors such as the invasion of Ukraine, bird flu, swine fever, and extreme weather internationally, driving prices up. Aspens are working closely with our chefs and supply partners to introduce new products and dishes, along with driving the best deals we can, but these mitigations have limits.

The Government is increasing the minimum wage by 9% in April. This is a positive move that will mean our teams are better able to address the cost pressures they are under, which is great progress, but does subsequently create funding pressures.

The situation is far from ideal, we would like as many students to enjoy our services as much as possible and we appreciate price increases make this harder, particularly when many families are feeling the effects of the general cost of living crisis. That said, we believe our food continues to offer excellent value for money overall.

As always, thank you for your support and understanding. We will continue to partner with schools, students, and parents to explore new approaches and gain input and feedback as we navigate this challenging period.

Aspens / Our Lady of Lourdes Multi-Academy Trust