September 2023

Dear Parent/Carer

Changes to the biometric cashless system in the canteen

Denefield currently operates a biometric cashless system for the school catering service using digital fingerprint recognition. From 19 October, we will be replacing this with a safe and secure alternative biometric authentication system using facial recognition. This forms part of planned improvements to the canteen.

Why are we moving to Facial Recognition?

- Students tell us queuing times are too long. We want to encourage as many students as possible to use the canteen and minimise queuing times at break and lunch. We have seen facial recognition in operation at another school. It is very quick, vastly speeding up service and reducing queuing times.
- Fingerprints can take several attempts before the system recognises the student. This slows down the queues for everyone.
- Facial recognition is more hygienic than fingerprint as there is no physical contact with the scanner.

Next steps

Students will need to have a scan of their face taken before the new system is introduced, but after that the system will automatically update as your child gets older.

As facial recognition is an alternative form of biometric data, we will need your permission for the use of biometric recognition systems in the school. A new consent will be needed even if you currently use fingerprint recognition to pay for meals and have already given permission for this. Your consent will then continue to be valid for as long as your child remains at Denefield, unless you withdraw your consent. You can withdraw your consent at any time by writing to the school.

How do I give my consent?

Please complete the biometrics opt-in form sent to you, to tell us whether you wish to use facial recognition for the school's cashless catering system.

If you choose not to opt-in, your child will not be able to use facial recognition but s/he will be given a PIN number to use in the canteen instead. It will no longer be possible to use digital fingerprints once we move to facial recognition.

Please see below for FAQs.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are you using biometric recognition?
Biometric recognition converts physical characteristics into a unique digital signature that can quickly and securely locate your child's cashless catering account. This helps speed up service and eliminates the requirement to carry cash or an alternative access method, such as a card that can be lost or stolen. The change from digital fingerprints to facial recognition will further help improve speed of service and queuing times.

How does it work?
When the student looks at the camera, the software reads key features (such as distance between facial features) and compares this against the database of registered users. When it finds a match, it automatically opens their cashless catering account allowing the operator to complete the sale of their school meals.

How is the data stored?
Facial Recognition data is a unique string of characters known as a faceprint template. This data is encrypted using AES 256 and stored on a school server within the secure school network or hosted on a secure Azure server. We store a photo along with the faceprint template. The cashless system has always stored a user's photo, which is used as an added verification by the canteen staff.

Can any other agency use these biometrics registrations?
No, the software turns your child's physical characteristics into an encrypted (using AES 256) string of characters known as a template. Even if someone gained access to the data and broke the encryption, this template does not contain enough information to reverse engineer it into a usable photo.

Can the face templates be used for other purposes outside of the canteen, such as for access control or registration?
No. Facial recognition is only available at the Point of Sale and is always operated by an authorised member of school or Harrisons catering staff. Facial recognition is not utilised in any way other than for this intended purpose.

What happens when my child leaves the school?
When a student leaves school, all data can be deleted very easily.

What if I change my mind?
If you opt-in to use of biometric data for your child but later change your mind, simply contact the school, and we will remove the permission from the system, automatically removing any biometric data associated with your child and providing your child with an alternative authentication method.