



SCHOOL MEALS DEBT RECOVERY POLICY

Approved by the Audit & Finance Committee

11.05.23

Due for renewal: MAY 2026

CHANGES

Version I

October 2015: Policy Implemented by Southernway Federation

February 2016: Policy amended by Discovery MAT

May 2020: School Meal Debt Action Timeline updated

Apr 2023: Reviewed and minor amendments made

CONTACTS

If you have any questions regarding this policy please contact the Chief Executive Officer or the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

PURPOSE

Discovery Multi Academy Trust's School Meals Debt Recovery Policy has been written to help our organisation adopt a consistent approach to debt incurred by parents whose children take school dinners. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

The Free School Meals system is there for parents of children of all ages to claim if they are in receipt of certain benefits; information is available from the school office or [Plymouth City Council's website](#).

All pupils in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are entitled to receive Universal Infant Free School Meals.

Therefore, this policy only relates to pupils in Key Stage 2 (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) whose parents pay for school meals.

Discovery Multi Academy Trust (the MAT) wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals which they then find difficult to clear. School is no different than any other business and meals taken must be paid for in advance.

It is very time consuming for the office staff to continually chase parents for payment - by letter, phone call or in person. It is also highly embarrassing for all concerned and occasionally it can have a negative effect on relationships with families.

The MAT's Board of Trustees feel that a system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach. This system will become easy to maintain once parents realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for FSM or UIFSM entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for. ParentPay the online cash collection / dinner money system highlights debt immediately so keeping track is easy.

The MAT will make parents aware of this policy in the following ways:

- A letter to parents
- Reminders in the weekly newsletter
- The school's website

This will ensure that all parents get the same message in a consistent way. This will be done at least once each year.

All parents will be provided with a copy of the policy when their child joins the school.

The letter to parents is attached as Appendix I.

KEY INFORMATION

1. All parents are provided with a copy of the debt policy when their child joins the school
2. All school lunches must be paid for in advance
3. No child should be sent to school without money in their account and expect to be given a meal
4. Where a debt has accrued, **after 2 days** parents will be asked to provide packed lunches from home until the debt has been cleared. Alternatively parents are reminded that they can take their child home for lunch if they wish
5. Parents who do not want their child to have a school meal should provide a healthy packed lunch

Appendix A

LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parents / Carers

SCHOOL MEALS DEBT RECOVERY POLICY

Due to an increase in the number of school meals that are regularly not being paid for, Weston Mill/Oakwood/Beechwood Primary Academy has adopted a **NO DEBT** policy relating to school meals.

We hope that all parents will give this policy their full support. As we all know, nobody takes their child to well-known high street restaurants and expect them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school. If debts are not cleared, they would ultimately have to be referred to the Board of Trustees, for debt recovery arrangements to be made.

If you believe that you may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals please contact the office for more details. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. We will help you all we can with your application.

All pupils in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 are entitled to receive Universal Infant Free School Meals.

Therefore, this policy relates to pupils in Key Stage 2 (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) whose parents pay for school meals.

Discovery MAT wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents to accrue large amounts of debt for school meals which they then find difficult to clear.

School meals must be **paid for in advance** using any of the methods of payment outlined below:

- Online at www.parentpay.com
- PayPoint bar code (available from the school office)

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school will grant a debt allowance of **one meal**. However, this debt must be paid the next day and future meals must be paid in advanced before any meal is provided.

If the debt is not cleared, parents must provide a packed lunch. In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the office will text or phone the parent to ask them to pay online at ParentPay or collect a Paypoint barcode or provide a packed lunch before lunchtime.

If payment of the debt is not received by Day 5, the school reserves the right to inform

the Chair of the Board of Trustees, who may decide to begin legal proceedings

against parents to recover the debt. The Family Support Advisor may also be informed.

By implementing this policy we are aiming to help parents limit unmanageable dinner money debts.

If you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully,

Alison Nettleship
Chief Executive Officer

SCHOOL MEAL DEBT – ACTION TIMELINE

TIMELINE	ACTION TO BE TAKEN BY DISCOVERY MAT ACADEMIES
Day 1 – Meal taken by child	Text reminder sent to parents to remind them of policy. Request to clear and apply a credit amount.
Day 2 – Debt remains unpaid	Text reminder to parent to ask them to pay online. Request for packed lunch for following day to be provided until debt cleared.
Day 3 – Debt remains unpaid	Phone call to parent to ensure a packed lunch is provided until debt is cleared. If necessary provide only a school packed lunch – school’s Family Support Advisor involved.
Day 4 – Debt remains unpaid	Head of School informed of situation. Continue to refuse further school meals until the debt has been cleared / as long as the child is being provided with a home packed lunch. Only provide a school packed lunch if none is provided from home.
Day 5 – Debt remains unpaid	A meeting to be arranged with the Head of School to consider action, including referral to the CEO / Board of Trustees. Continue to refuse further school meals until the debt has been cleared / as long as the child is being provided with a home packed lunch. Only provide a school packed lunch if none is provided from home.