



# **SCHOOL MEALS DEBT RECOVERY POLICY**

**Summer Term 2024**

**Due for renewal: Summer Term 2025**

## **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/carers whose children take school dinners. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents/carers clearly understand what is expected of them.

The Free School Meals system is there for parents/carers 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/carers pay for school meals.**

Discovery Multi Academy Trust (the MAT) wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents/carers 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/carers 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/carers realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents/carers 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/carers aware of this policy in the following ways:

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

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

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

The letter to parents/carers is attached as Appendix I.

## KEY INFORMATION

1. All parents/carers 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/carers will be asked to provide packed lunches from home until the debt has been cleared. Alternatively, parents/carers are reminded that they can take their child home for lunch if they wish.
5. Parents/carers who do not want their child to have a school meal should provide a healthy packed lunch.

## Appendix I

### LETTER TO PARENTS/CARERS

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, The Trust has adopted a **NO DEBT** policy relating to school meals.

We hope that all parents/carers 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/carers pay for school meals.**

Discovery MAT wishes to avoid a situation which allows parents/carers 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](http://www.parentpay.com)
- PayPoint bar code (available from the school office)

If a parent/carer 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/carers 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/carer 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/carers to recover the debt. The Family Support Advisor may also be informed.

By implementing this policy, we are aiming to help parents/carers 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/carers to remind them of policy. Request to clear and apply a credit amount.
Day 2 – Debt remains unpaid	Text reminder to parents/carers 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 parents/carers 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 <b>packed lunch</b> 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. <b>Only provide a school packed lunch if none is provided from home.</b>