



Debt Recovery Policy

Approved On/By:	Full Governing Body
Last Reviewed On:	09/12/2024
Next Review Due By:	FSP Spring Term 2026
Monitoring & Review:	Annually
Staff Member(S) Responsible:	Mr S Farren - Operations Business Manager



Debt Recovery Policy

The school is under a duty to provide free school meals to those who are eligible, but there is no obligation beyond this. If arrears exist, the school can refuse to continue to provide meals. As most parents appreciate no-one would take their child to a restaurant and expect them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school.

Introduction

This policy sets out the procedures for recovering debts owed to Hodge Hill College for school meals, trips, and other charges. Our aim is to ensure that all debts are managed in a fair and consistent manner, while being sensitive to the financial circumstances of families

Objectives

- To ensure all parents are aware of the school's expectations regarding payment for school services.
- To establish a clear process for recovering debts.
- To provide support to families facing financial difficulties.

Communication of Payment Expectations

- At the start of each term, parents will receive communication outlining the cost of school meals, and other payable activities via the Weekly Bulletin.
- Reminders will be sent out weekly to ensure parents are aware of any deficit balances.

Procedure for Managing Debt

- **Initial Verbal Reminder:** Catering Staff will remind pupils if their balance is running low or if the recent purchase has taken their account into a deficit balance.
- **Initial Text Message/MyEd App Notification:** If the account is in a deficit balance/a payment is overdue, a member of the admin team will contact the parent/carer with a friendly reminder text message on the same day informing them to credit their account within 5 days. If the account has been taken over the FSM allowance of £2.60, the account will be automatically locked meaning no further transactions can be processed until the parent/carer credits their ParentPay account (*ensure that the funds pay off the deficit balance and also allow for any additional purchases if required*). Until the parent/carer is able to credit the account, they must send in a packed lunch with their child.
- **Follow-up Letter:** If the debt remains unpaid after 5 days of the initial text message/MyEd App notification, a formal letter will be sent detailing the outstanding amount and requesting payment within 14 days by the date stated on the letter. A copy of this letter will be retained on the pupil's record.
- **Meeting Invitation:** Should the debt still be unpaid by the date stated in the letter, the parent/carer will be invited to a meeting with the School Business Manager to discuss repayment options, which may include a payment plan.
- All correspondence will be recorded internally.

Sanctions for Non-Payment

- Continued access to school meals and trips will be restricted if debts are not cleared, except where this would affect the wellbeing of the pupil.
- In cases where meals are involved, if there's a concern for the child's welfare, the Designated Safeguarding Lead will be informed and strategies will be implemented in these circumstances.

Writing Off Debt

- In some circumstances, it may be necessary to write off a debt. This decision will be made by the Headteacher and School Business Manager/Achievement Coordinator, considering any guidelines set by the local authority.

Legal Action

- Legal action will be considered as a last resort. Before any such action is taken, professional legal advice will be sought.

Support for Parents

- Parents experiencing financial hardship will be directed to local support services, including charities and debt advice organisations.

Monitoring and Review

- The Operations Business Manager will review the amount of outstanding debt every half term to determine whether the level is acceptable and if the debt recovery process is effective.
- This policy will be reviewed annually by the school leadership team to ensure its effectiveness and fairness.