



Debt Recovery Policy

St Thomas CE Academy

Approved by:	Trust Board	Date:
Last reviewed on:	1 st February 2024	
Next review due by:	February 2025	Review cycle: Annually

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God's Love in Action

Our children are at the heart of everything we do through *Christian values and relationships*. *Living and learning together* we celebrate the uniqueness and diversity of everyone in our family. We nurture a sense of *self-belief, mutual respect and belonging* through Social Emotional Learning and academic excellence. We are dedicated to building the foundations for *happy and successful life-long learning*.



Faith



Friendship



Love



Trust

1. Overview

All at St Thomas Church of England Academy recognise that the physical and emotional wellbeing of the children in our care is of paramount importance. The school, however, has a legal and moral obligation to apply the resources it receives fairly, to support and for the benefit of all pupils, and is not in a position to subsidise, on a regular basis any one child or group of children.

The school has therefore adopted a Debt Recovery Policy aimed at supporting parents, carers and families in avoiding accumulation of debts in relation to services within school such as school dinners, school trips and residential and after school activity clubs. Parents/carers are expected to pay in advance for services provided by the school and this can be paid using the online payment system, Arbor.

All debts owed to a school including those due from parents/carers have an impact on the school budget as the school must meet the actual costs incurred. This means that any money owed to the school diminishes the resources that can be provided to all children. We hope that parents/carers understand this and that they will make every effort to avoid owing the school money.

2. School Meals Debt

For children in Key Stage 2 and for those families not receiving the Pupil Premium grant for Free School Meals, it is the duty of parents/carers, not the school, to provide a midday meal for their child. Parents/carers may take their child home to discharge this obligation but if they elect to leave the child on the school site during the lunch period, they must either provide a packed lunch for the child or request that the school provide a lunch. Parents/carers whose child is not entitled to Free School Meals are expected to pay for these in advance.

The Governors of St Thomas reserve the right not to provide a school meal in circumstances where payment has not been made. It is very important that if a parent or a carer believes their child may be eligible for Free School Meals, please contact the school office to help you to this. This allowance is a statutory right, and it is vital that parents/carers use it if they qualify. We will help parents/carers with their application, as required, to find out if they are eligible. If a parent/carers genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of five meals.

However, this accrued debt must be paid within one week and future meals must be paid for in advance before any meal is provided. If the debt is not cleared, parents should provide a packed lunch. In a case where a debt payment is neither received within the allowed time nor a packed lunch provided, the school office will telephone the parents/carers requesting that they come to the school to make an immediate payment. The Governors of St Thomas reserve the right to begin legal proceedings against the parents/carers to recover the debt. Birmingham Children's Trust may also be informed that these parents are not carrying out their responsibility of care by not providing food for their child at lunchtime. See below for the recovery timetable.

3. Debt Recovery

The Governors of St Thomas will take all reasonable measures to vigorously collect debt as part of its management of public funds. The school's debt recovery policy will observe the relevant financial regulations and any other legal requirements.

4. Acceptable 'Credit Period'

The Governors of St Thomas has determined that one half term is an acceptable 'credit settlement period' before debt recovery procedures are applied.

5. Reporting of Outstanding Debt Levels

The Headteacher will ensure that the level of outstanding debt is regularly monitored. Suitable records will be maintained to detail individual debts and the total value of debt to the school in order that it can be determined at any time and reported to the School's Local Academy Board. The Board will review the level of outstanding debts every term to determine whether this level is acceptable and whether action to recover debts is effective.

6. Debt Recovery Procedures

Where payment from the parents/carers has not been received in advance, or at the end of the first week, the following process will be applied:

- An initial reminder will be sent to parents/carers by letter and a text will be sent to the parents/carers informing them of the letter.
- A reminder letter is then sent a maximum of 14 days after the original debt remains unpaid, after the due date. If the debt remains unpaid after a further 7 days, the school will contact the parents/carers by telephone.
- A final reminder letter will be issued 2 weeks after the initial reminder. If action is to proceed further, it is necessary to prove that all reasonable attempts have been made to recover the debt, and that these attempts have been made in a timely manner, i.e. at the time the debt first became overdue.
- If there is no response to the second formal reminder letter the parents/carers will be invited to meet the Headteacher to discuss how the debt will be settled.
- An official invoice may be issued for the full amount at the discretion of the Local Academy Board. This will trigger the school's recovery process. The parents/carers may be advised that they will be required to pay in advance going forward. The decision and its basis will be recorded and reported to the Local Academy Board and the parents/carers.

Within 10 days a of the second formal reminder letter a decision should be made regarding further activity, which may include legal action.

7. The Recovery Timetable

Action	Total Days	Elapsed days
Invoice	1	1
First Reminder	14	15
Telephone Call	23	7
Final Reminder	37	14
Within 10 days a decision should be made regarding further activity, which may include legal action.		

8. Negotiation or Repayment Terms

Parents/carers in debt to the school are expected to settle the amount by a single payment as soon as possible after receiving the initial reminder. If they are unable to pay the school may reduce or cancel a debt in certain circumstances. A sensitive approach to debt recovery will be taken and the following factors will be considered:

Hardship	- Where paying the debt will cause financial hardship.
Ill Health	- Where our recovery action might cause further ill health.
Time	- Where the debt is large compared to the person's income and it would take an unreasonable amount of time to discharge in full.
Cost	- Where someone owes more than one debt to the school.
Multiple Debt	In this situation, an attempt to agree one repayment plan to include all debts will be established.

Repayment terms may be negotiated at the discretion of the Headteacher. A record of all such agreements entered will be retained. In all cases a letter will be issued to the parents/carers confirming the agreed terms for repayment. The settlement period should be the shortest that is judged reasonable.

9. Bad Debts

The write-off any debt up to £500 requires the written approval of the Local Academy Board. Debts above £500 will be referred to the Finance and Personnel Committee. A record of the write-off, the reason for it, and the approval will be recorded in the minutes of the Finance and Personnel Governing Committee. Similarly, the decisions of the Committee, regarding referrals to it, shall be recorded in its minutes.

10. Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

The Headteacher and the school's Local Academy Board will assess the implementation and effectiveness of this policy. The policy will be promoted and implemented. This Policy will be reviewed by the School's Local Academy Board on a three yearly cycle and will be signed by the Chair of Governors. Adherence to the policy will be monitored by the school's Local Academy Board.