

Mercia Primary Academy Trust



Dinner Money Debt Policy

Policy Status and Review

Date:	July 2024
Review Date:	July 2025
Signed by Director:	Garry Hirons
Date Signed:	10/07/2024

Introduction:

It is a parent's responsibility to ensure that a child is provided with a meal at school either a packed lunch or a school meal. Parents are responsible for ensuring school meals are paid for and the school has a responsibility to ensure that money is not owed for school meals. Mercia Primary Academy Trust cannot, and will not, permit any debts outstanding. Therefore, a policy is required to ensure that school meal debts are kept to a minimum. In writing this policy, the Governors of Mercia Primary Academy Trust wish to implement a policy that ensures meals are paid for, whilst aiding Parents/Carers during financial difficulties and ensuring children still receive a meal at lunchtime.

Procedures:

School meals **MUST** be paid for in advance of meals being taken via the school's ParentPay system or Pay Point kiosks. Meals may be paid for on a weekly, monthly, half-termly or termly basis. Whichever method parents choose to take to pay for the meals, it is parent's responsibility to ensure that enough funds are provided to cover the full cost of their child's meals (currently at £2.83 per day). Please note, that once a child places an order for a meal it is the parent's responsibility to meet the cost of the ordered food.

As soon as the school are notified that a child will be leaving the school, the office will check the balance of a child's account. If the account is in arrears, all funds will need to be cleared before the child's final day. If the account is in credit, these funds will be refunded back to you.

If you think your child may be eligible to receive free school meals, please contact the following service for further advice and guidance:

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/educationalawardsbenefits/FreeSchoolMeals/home.aspx>

If you are in receipt of any of the following, you may need to check your eligibility on the link above:

The entitlement criteria from 1 April 2018 is -

- Income Support
- Income Based Job Seekers Allowance
- Income Related Employment and Support Allowance
- eligible for Child Tax Credit **but not** Working Tax Credit and the household income (as used by HMRC to assess tax credits) is not more than £16,190.
- **Please note:** anyone eligible for Working Tax Credit, or if you have a partner and they receive it, regardless of Income, you will not qualify
- The Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- In receipt of the 4 week run on of working tax credit (this is where someone becomes unemployed or reduces their hours and so is no longer entitled to working tax credit but will continue to receive it for a further 4 weeks and is entitled to free meals during that time)
- Universal credit (provided you have an annual net earned household income of no more than £7,400 as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods). Your net earned income is your household income after taxes and deductions and does not include income from Universal Credit or any other benefits you may receive.

Debt Procedures

In collecting any outstanding debts, a step by step process will be followed. The time lapse between each stage will normally be five school days. However, this may vary depending on factors such as the time period within a term. The next step will be implemented if the debt has not been repaid or any contact made with the school.

Stage 1 – (Appendix A) each day, dinner money is reviewed by staff as lunches are taken by the children. If your child exceeds the allowed debt of £0.01 debt level on your ParentPay account, the school will send a text message reminding you to top up the account. This text will also remind parents that it is the parent's responsibility to provide a packed lunch for their child until the debt is cleared and normal school lunch service can be resumed. If a child arrives at school without a packed lunch the school office will contact parents to arrange for a lunch to be delivered to school immediately.

Stage 2 – (Appendix B) For those parents who receive the Stage 1 text message and have not made a payment within the 'five school day' time frame, a Stage 2 letter will be sent home in the post requesting that either a payment is made in full within 5 days, or that the parents contact the school to make an appointment with the Headteacher to discuss the outstanding debt.

Stage 3 – (Appendix C) For those debtors which received the stage 2 letter the week before and have not cleared the debt, the school will contact the parents by telephone to arrange an appointment to meet with the Headteacher, a copy of this verbal agreement will then be sent home to the parent via Royal Mail. For debtors who receive the stage 3 letter the previous week, cases will be referred to Governors who will make a decision on how to deal with the debt.

If parents do not contact the school regarding the debt and no payment is made, additional administrative costs may be added to the debt, if this is necessary then Governors may seek to reclaim these costs and any outstanding debts through the Small Claims Court.

If parents fall into debt on more than three occasions during a term, then the school reserve the right to refuse to provide the school meal service for the rest of the term.

If any monies are outstanding at the end of the academic year, the school reserve the right to charge an administration fee for time taken to recoup this outstanding debt as well as claiming the money owed through the small claims court.

We acknowledge that on occasion, families have financial difficulties and in these proven circumstances, the school will work hard with the family to agree a solution which is not at the detriment of the child. In the event of a child leaving Mercia Primary Academy Trust with an outstanding debt, the Governing Body will need to consider what further actions to take which may include contacting the child's new school and informing them of any concerns.

Appendix A: Stage 1 Text Message

Date – _____

Dear Parent, your child owes £2.83 for school dinners, please top up your ParentPay account and provide sandwiches until the debt is cleared. Many thanks

Appendix B – Stage 2 Letter

Date - _____

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re – School Meals

You will recall that the school sent you a text message on _____ regarding your child's dinner money account. The balance as of _____ is £_____. As you know, it is the policy of Mercia Primary Academy Trust that the school does not pay for school meals on behalf of the children. I am disappointed that you have not paid the monies owing via the ParentPay as requested in our text message and would request that you telephone the school to make an appointment to see me to discuss this further, or settle the outstanding debt in full.

Thank you for your assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have an questions.

Yours sincerely

Mr R Lane
CEO Mercia Primary Academy Trust

Appendix C – Stage 3 Letter

Date - _____

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re – School Meals

I am disappointed that you have been unable to contact me to make arrangements to recover the outstanding debt of £_____. In line with the school's Dinner Money Debt Policy and procedures, a copy of which is available on the school website. I have no option but to refer this outstanding debt to the School Governors.

The School Governors will consider the situation and will contact you again in due course over the action they will take, which may include pursuing the debt through the Small Claims Courts, and therefore could incur further costs.

Yours sincerely

Mr R Lane
CEO Mercia Primary Academy Trust

Dinner Money Debt Policy

This information can be made available in a range of formats and languages, including Braille and large print. If this would be useful to you or someone you know, please contact your Directorate HR Unit.

A signed copy of this document is available from the office.

Version Control

Version	Date Approved	Changes	Reasons for Alterations
1	March 2019		
	March 2021	Added a range of different formats	Accessibility
	November 2022	Changed dinner price from £2.35 to £2.57	Price increase by catering company
	February 2023	Changed dinner price from £2.57 to £2.83	Price increase by catering company
	Sept 2023	No changes	
	July 2024	No changes	