

Staffordshire University Academies Trust		Trust Policy Document			
Approved by:	Trust Board	Issue date:	Sept 2021	Review date:	Sept 2022
Policy Owner:	COO	Page: 1 of 5			
Audience:	Trustees <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Parents <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Staff <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> General Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Students <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Local Academy Council <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

Debt Recovery Policy **(Provision of meals and refreshments)**

Purpose

The following protocol is suggested to cover those circumstances where parents have not paid for their children's meals.

Meals and refreshments for the Academies in SUAT are currently provided by variety of providers.

Any debt remains the responsibility of the establishment.

Protocol for non-payment of school meals (paid meals)

This is a protocol to cover circumstances where parents have not paid for their children's school meals for a period of time.

The Academy concerned should identify non-payment and investigate the reason for non-payment and enquire whether the family is eligible to receive Free School Meals. If so, the parents should be advised to make an application via the County Council using their web site <http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/education/educationalawardsbenefits/FreeSchoolMeals/home.aspx>.

If the pupils are entitled to free school meals the application will **not** be backdated. The Academy needs to ascertain the first day of eligibility and still pursue any outstanding debt from the parents.

If the Academy is concerned about the wellbeing/welfare of the pupil(s) at any stage in this process, they should contact the appropriate services for advice and guidance.

N.B. – these services are not involved in the procedures for the recovering of debt.

Throughout any stage of these processes, the Academy may agree a payment by instalment process with the parents that would negate the need for further action to be taken. Should that agreement then break down, the Protocol would be reintroduced.

It may be necessary to manage the situation more closely if more than one child from the same family receives school meals (where a substantial debt can accumulate quickly), and where there is a known history of bad debt.

Where more stringent procedures than those described here are currently in use there is no intention that those procedures be relaxed.

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Protocol to be followed:-

Step 1. Parent fails to pay for a pupil's school meal for a period of three weeks

A reminder letter on Academy headed notepaper (see example letter Appendix A) should be sent to the parents at the end of the first week for which income has not been received. Similar letters should be sent on a weekly basis for three weeks. The third letter should state that provision of school meals may be withdrawn if no payment is forthcoming.

Step 2. Parent fails to pay for pupil's school meal and this continues for a 4 week period

- The Academy will continue to ask parent for payment during the third week.
- After 4 weeks, the Academy will send a letter on headed paper (see example letter Appendix B) (to be sent as soon as possible during the fifth week without payment) to the parent requesting that payment be made forthwith and within 7 days. **The letter must also state that if payment is not made then meals will not be provided to their child/children from the start of the following week and that the parent must make alternative lunchtime arrangements e.g. provision of a packed lunch.**

NB The Academy should not continue to provide meals on the basis that payment has been promised. **See comments under step 5.**

Step 3. Parent continues not to pay for school meals – meals have now been provided for five weeks without payment

- Under these circumstances, meals would have continued to have been provided for the 5 week period and the debt will be mounting per child – with a family the debt could be significantly more.
- The deadline stated in the second letter has now expired and if the parent has not paid, alternative arrangements should now be in place for the pupil's lunch. If alternative arrangements are not in place on the first day of the week the Academy need to remind the parents to supply a packed lunch.

Step 4. Parent continues not to pay for pupil's school meal beyond the 5 week period and after the second letter has been sent

- If, after exhaustive efforts, the Academy is not able to recover the debt that mounted up prior to meals being stopped, the Academy would request an external invoice to be raised by SUAT's Chief Finance Officer.
- The SUAT Finance Team - will help in creating a new customer within the financial systems and raising invoices as necessary.
- If the debt continues, a schedule of 'bad debts' may appear and if non-payment is confirmed the SUAT, in consultation with the relevant Headteacher will need to decide whether to 'write-off' the debt (**the Academy would stand the cost**) – or whether to take legal proceedings against the parents.

CAREFUL CONSIDERATION BY THE AUDIT COMMITTEE OF SUAT WOULD NEED TO BE GIVEN TO THIS BEFORE REACHING SUCH A DECISION.

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Step 5.

Procedure should the Academy breach this SUAT guidance and decide to continue to provide a school meal and the non-payment continues during the period after an external invoice has been sent and possible legal proceedings are initiated.

If pupil(s) have continued to receive meals without payment **this will therefore be at the Academy's cost.**

ACADEMIES WOULD NEED TO CONSIDER VERY CAREFULLY THE REASONS FOR CONTINUING TO PROVIDE A SCHOOL MEAL UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES ANY DEBT CONTINUES TO REMAIN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ACADEMY.

The SUAT would not be involved in any debt recovery should the school continue to provide meals after stage 4 has been instigated.

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APPENDIX A

Dear

Pupil:

I am writing to remind you that according to our records, you have arrears on your child's dinner money account. In order for your child to continue to receive school lunches it is important to keep your account in credit.

Our records show that for your child **XXXXXXXX** your debit is **[balance]**.

Please arrange for this to be paid immediately, preferably by using ParentPay, our secure online payment system. You can use the login previously provided. Please visit www.parentpay.com

Your username and password are:

Username

Password

You can check your account balance at anytime by logging into your ParentPay account.

Non-payment for school meals affects the quality of service we are able to offer to the children therefore we need to ensure that all accounts are up-to-date. Once the debt is cleared please ensure the account remains in credit.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears or if you have difficulty making payment please contact the Academy office to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely

Principal

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APPENDIX B

Dear

Final Debt Reminder

Our records show that you have still not paid dinner money for your child **XXXXXXXXXX**.

As at **XXXXXXXXXX** your account is showing a debt balance of **[balance]**. Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately. Failure to bring your account up to date within 7 days will result in your child being denied a school meal from the start of the following week. You must make alternative lunchtime arrangements for your child e.g. provision of a packed lunch.

Once the debt is cleared please ensure your child's school meal account remains in credit.

You have two ways to pay the outstanding amount:

1. Online payment via ParentPay

Please visit www.parentpay.com and login using your username and password:

Username
Password

2. In cash at a local store using the PayPoint card provided to you

If you have misplaced your PayPoint card please take this letter to your nearest PayPoint store along with your payment. The store will scan the barcode at the bottom of this letter and the payment will be credited to your child's account.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the Academy office immediately.

Yours sincerely

Principal

PAYPOINT BARCODE REQUIRED