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## DINNER MONEY DEBT POLICY

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Date of Next Review: Summer 2022

Responsible Officer(s): CFO

**Dinner Money Debt Procedure**  
**PUBLIC**

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## **Introduction**

This policy has been written to help schools within the Vision Academy Learning Trust (VALT) adopt a consistent approach to debt incurred by parents/carers whose children take school meals. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents/carers clearly understand what is expected of them.

**It is a parent's responsibility to ensure that a child is provided with either a packed lunch or a school meal each day.**

The responsibility of ensuring school meal payments are made by parents/carers lies with the school. Therefore, a policy is required to ensure school meal debts are kept to a minimum. In writing this policy, the Trust wish to implement one that ensures meals are paid for, whilst aiding parents/carers during financial difficulties and ensuring children still receive a meal at lunchtime.

VALT has a clear 'no debt' policy relating to the school meal service. If debts are incurred, then the school budget has to pay for them. This means that money which should be spent on the children's education is used to pay for debts incurred by parents/carers. Every parent/carer will agree that this is unacceptable and we request that all parents/carers give this policy their full support.

We hope that through implementing this debt policy we will help parents/carers manage school dinner money better and at the same time ensure that all money that is for children's learning is used appropriately.

## **Procedures**

School meals **must** be paid for in advance of meals being taken. All payments are made online through the School Communication System in use at your child's school.

Meals may be paid for on a daily, weekly, half termly or termly basis. The minimum payment accepted for meals is the cost for one day. Children will not be provided with a school meal unless it is paid for, except those that are entitled to free school meals. If a parent/carer genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of up to 2 days cost per child. However this debt must be paid immediately on request, before any further meals are provided.

As soon as school are notified that a child is leaving a member of the office staff will run a check on the balance of the child's account. Any debt outstanding must be paid in full, and any credit balance will be refunded.

## Free School Meals

If you think your child may be eligible to receive free school meals there is now a fast and easy new way to apply. Please visit <https://www.cloudforedu.org.uk/ofsm/valt> and complete the online check. Alternatively, please contact your child's school directly.

Free school meals are available to pupils based on the following benefits:

- Universal Credit (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods)
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guarantee element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for four weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

To complete an application you will need to provide:

- Your own name and date of birth
- Contact details
- National Insurance Number or National Asylum Seekers Number
- Child's name and date of birth
- School your child is attending/will attend.

## Debt procedures

In collecting any outstanding debts, a step by step process will be followed.

Everyday dinner money debt will be reviewed, if an individual child's account is 2 days or more in debt the following procedure will apply:

1. Each debt will be reviewed and a text message will be sent, via the School Communication System, to the parent. (Appendix A) This text requests that the child is provided with a packed lunch until the debt is cleared. The School Office will ensure this is adhered to. If the child arrives at school without a packed lunch the parent/carer will be telephoned asking them to bring this into school immediately.
2. For those debts which received a text message and the debt has not been cleared the following day, a phone call will be made by one of the office team to find out when the debt will be cleared. The parent/carer will also be reminded that a packed lunch must be provided from home until the debt is cleared.

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3. For those debts that have received a text message and a phone call and the debt has still not been cleared, "Debt Letter One" (Appendix B) will be sent via Royal Mail requesting the immediate payment of the outstanding debt.
4. For those debts that have received items 1-3 and the debts have still not been cleared "debt letter two" will be sent via Royal Mail recorded delivery. (Appendix C)
5. The School will contact the parent by telephone to arrange an appointment. If this meeting is not kept or a satisfactory situation agreed, the debt will be referred to the Finance and Resources Committee and "debt letter three" will be sent via Royal Mail recorded delivery. (Appendix D).
6. For debts, which received "letter three" the Finance and Resources Committee will make a decision on next steps to recover the debt.

If parents do not contact the school regarding the debt and no payment is paid, additional administration costs may be added to the debt. If this is necessary, the Trustees may seek to reclaim these costs and any outstanding debt through the Small Claims Court.

If parents fall into debt more than three times in a term the school reserves the right to refuse to provide meals 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 to the detriment of the child. In the event of a child leaving a member school with an outstanding debt, the Finance and Resources Committee will need to consider what further steps to take. This may include contacting the child's new school and informing them of concerns.

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**Appendix A**

***Your child(ren)'s account has an outstanding balance of £..... Please can this be settled today. Please can you provide a packed lunch until the debt is cleared. Thank you***

## Appendix B

### Letter 1

Date :

Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms XXXXX

Re: School Dinner Payments for.....

Dinner Money Rate: Daily £\_\_\_\_/Weekly £\_\_\_\_

According to our records ..... has been taking school meals recently. It appears that we have not received sufficient money to cover this cost. We sent you a text message on ..... and we phoned you on..... but you have not communicated with the school to discuss how and when the debt will be cleared.

The outstanding balance as at..... was £..... I would be grateful if payment could be paid by ....., via (School Communication System) including monies for the forthcoming week/half term/term if this is relevant.

It is the policy of Vision Academy Learning Trust that the School does not pay for dinners on behalf of the children. I would be grateful if you could arrange for prompt payment of this outstanding debt.

Please ensure ..... is provided with a packed lunch until this debt is cleared and school dinners can re-commence.

Due to the ever increasing debts owing for children's dinners, it is imperative that payment for meals is made promptly to the school, in advance of meals being taken.

Thank you for your assistance. If you wish to discuss this further, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

XXXXXXXXXX

## **Appendix C**

### **Letter 2**

Date:

Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms XXXXXXXXX

#### **Re: School Dinners**

You will recall that we wrote to you previously regarding the outstanding balance on..... dinner money account. The balance as at ..... is £.....

As you know, it is the policy of Vision Academy Learning Trust that the School does not pay for dinners on behalf of the children.

As you have failed to clear the outstanding debt as previously requested, via SIMS Pay, I will be phoning you in due course to arrange an appointment to discuss this further.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions in the meantime.

Yours sincerely,

XXXXXXXXXXXXXX

## **Appendix D**

Date:

Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms XXXXXXXXX

### **Re: School Dinners**

I am disappointed you were unable to make your appointment on..... to discuss arrangements to recover the outstanding dinner money 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 Finance and Resources Committee who may decide to make a claim in the small claims court.

The Finance and Resources Committee will consider the situation and you will be contacted in due course regarding the recovery of the outstanding debt.

Yours sincerely

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Head of School