

Roseacre Primary Academy

Debt Recovery Policy



1. Statement of intent

Roseacre Primary Academy and Nursery is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all pupils, regardless of financial circumstances, and has established policies and procedures to ensure that no child is discriminated against by our offering of school trips, activities and educational extras.

While this is the case, the school must have a policy in place to ensure the repayment and recuperation of any outstanding debts incurred by the school on behalf of a pupil. The school will take all reasonable measures to vigorously collect debts as part of its management of public funds.

The Governing Body has a duty to ensure the academy receives all the funds to which it is entitled. This policy has been created to ensure the appropriate procedures are in place to deal with debts and the recovery of assets. It encompasses all debts owed to the school including, but not limited to, payments for goods, services, educational visits, music tuition and school meal payments.

Parents should be made aware of and given access to this policy and the academy's procedures. It will be included on the academy website and made available to view on request.

Each case is to be treated individually and the circumstances that have led to the outstanding debt will be taken into account to determine the best course of action and whether it is fair and reasonable to pursue the debt in its entirety if at all. The school is committed to adhering to legal requirements regarding charging for school food, activities and materials, and meeting all statutory guidance provided by the DfE.

2. Rationale

This Policy recognises the difficulties placed on Headteachers in balancing the social welfare of pupils with the management of the academy budget. It is fair and just and sets out a clear procedure for families.

The Academy is responsible for managing payments and arrears for school meals and other services, and these are processed through the main budget. Where debts are incurred, the academy budget has to pay for them; this means that money that should be spent on the children's education is used to pay for debts incurred by parents. Every parent will agree that this is unacceptable and we request that all parents give this policy their full support.

Roseacre Primary Academy makes every effort to reduce the cost of meals, trips and various other activities outlined in the Charging and Remissions Policy.

3. Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- DfE (2018) 'Charging for school activities'
- DfE (2023) 'Schemes for financing schools'

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Charging and Remissions Policy

4. Roles and responsibilities

The headteacher is responsible for:

- The overall implementation of this policy and ensuring that all staff, parents and pupils are aware of their responsibilities.
- Consultations if legal services are required for debt recovery.
- Deciding to write off debt due to exceptional circumstances.

The operations manager and headteacher are responsible for:

- Reviewing this policy on an annual basis.
- Regularly reviewing details of its debts and what recovery action is needed.
- Adhering to the privacy rights of pupils and their guardians in all cases.
- Ensuring instances of debt are judged on an individual basis, with consideration of the nature of the debt and the circumstances of the family involved.

The operations manager and office staff are responsible for:

- Recording debt reminders, and ensuring those records are maintained for a period of two years.
- Ensuring the privacy of the pupil and their family will be protected by all staff.
- Ensuring the level of outstanding debt owed to the school can be determined at short notice.

Parents and carers are expected to maintain all payable accounts in credit at all times. The academy reserves the right to restrict access to fee-based services, including but not limited to the Breakfast and Afterschool Club, Music Lessons, and School Dinners, should accounts fall into arrears and no attempt is made by parents or carers to address the outstanding balance. Each individual case will be reviewed and evaluated independently.

5. School Dinners

The academy is under a duty to provide free school meals to those who are eligible but there is no obligation beyond this. School meals should be paid for in advance on the Arbor App. The academy reserves the right to contact parents regularly regarding outstanding amounts of their child's account to ask for payment. ***If arrears exist, the academy can refuse to continue to provide meals, and may request a packed lunch is provided.***

Roseacre Primary Academy makes every effort to reduce the cost of meals to our pupils, and the charge for parents is reviewed annually. The academy will support parents through financial hardship and may provide meals free of charge for a short period of time or provide

a food parcel to help in the preparation of packed lunches. Individual cases are considered by the headteacher/ DSL.

6. Breakfast and Afterschool Club

The academy is under no obligation to provide extended care free of charge, in the form of breakfast and afterschool club. The roll out of a 30 minute free breakfast club as outlined by the Government has not come into effect at Roseacre Primary Academy as of yet.

Breakfast and afterschool club should be paid for in advance via ParentPay. Each parent has signed the Terms and Conditions stating that should the outstanding balance on the account be more than £50, ***we reserve the right to pause your child's place until payment has been received (the only exception to this is if parents pay through various schemes, which are claimed in arrears).*** This is also to ensure that the balance owed does not reach an unaffordable amount, which may cause stress and concern for our families.

The academy reserves the right to contact parents regularly regarding outstanding amounts of their child's account to ask for payment.

7. Private Music Lessons

Parents have the opportunity to sign their child up to receive private music tuition lessons through Blackpool Music Service. The charge for these lessons are set by Blackpool Music Service.

Roseacre Primary Academy reserves the right to stop your child's participation in private lessons if payment is not received. Lessons should be paid for in advance on the Arbor App.

8. Debt Management

Where payment for school meals, BASC or other services is not received in advance and when arrears accumulate, the following procedures apply:

Stage 1: Informal Reminder – At the end of the week in which the account has fallen into arrears, the parent will be informally reminded (in person over the telephone, by text or a note home) and immediate payment requested.

Stage 2: Formal Reminder - If the account remains in arrears one week after the informal reminder, a formal letter will be sent to the parent. The formal letter (which may be sent via Arbor/ email) will request immediate payment or a payment towards the outstanding balance. Another phone call will also be made.

Stage 3: Second Letter - If any of the following apply:

- no response is received following the formal letter;
- no payment plan is agreed;
- the agreed payment plan is not being adhered to, or

- the account falls further into arrears

Another letter will be sent home as well as a phone call, asking that the balance be paid in full or a payment plan agreed. ***Parents will be informed the service will no longer be available if payment is not received within 2 days, or a payment plan is not agreed.***

Stage 4: Final notice - Parents will be informed via telephone and a letter that the service is no longer available due to non-payment. Parents will need to provide a packed lunch or alternative childcare for extended services.

A request will be made to clear the debt within 14 days. Parents will be reminded of the Debt Management Policy and that the academy reserves the right to take legal action to recover debts.

It is expected that the debt will be repaid as soon as possible, particularly after repeated reminders; however, this will be negotiated at the discretion of the operations manager or headteacher. Payment plans may also be agreed upon.

Services will be reinstated once the arrears have been paid in full.

9. Legal Action

The headteacher and academy reserves the right to commence legal proceedings against debtors for any of the above services. Legal action will commence if the balance is overdue by four months, and a payment plan has either not been agreed or adhered to. Parents/carers will be reminded regularly throughout this period via letters that we may recover the balance through the Small Claims Court.

10. Waiving of debts

The school will ensure that parents of pupils are aware of the help the school can extend to those in financial difficulty.

Any write-offs will be in line with guidance in the Academies Financial Handbook and Scheme of Delegation.

The waiving of debts is at the discretion of the Headteacher and the CFO, as outlined in the Scheme of Delegation. Within these limits a debt may be waived when it is believed the debtor is experiencing serious financial hardship or if all reasonable avenues to recover the debt have been exhausted and it is believed it would not be cost effective to pursue the debt through legal action.

In a case where there is, or it is suspected that there is, an overdue debt from a family who may qualify for remissions, details will be agreed upon by the headteacher and shared with families via telephone and/or email.

11. Debt recovery costs

It may be advisable to waive or partially waive debts where it is deemed that it does not make financial sense to continue allocating time and resources to pursuing.

The headteacher will review any case a debt may be waived, and come to a final decision based on the value of costs versus value of the debt.

12. Monitoring and review

The evaluation of this policy is based on the level of debt being reduced over time and a robust system being in place to ensure that every attempt is made to recover monies owed to the academy.

This Policy will be available to view on our website, and a paper copy is available upon request.

This Policy will be reviewed every two years, or as required.