



Parental debt recovery policy

North Star Community Trust Academies

November 2024

We have a strict policy of no debts on accounts.

Parents must ensure that payments are made promptly and their account is always in credit.

Our objective

To minimise the risk of school debt with regard to school meals, clubs, trips, extended care and any other charging activity, our academy will take all reasonable steps to ensure that debts are not incurred and to vigorously collect any that do arise.

It is not appropriate for our academies to carry debt as this comes from funding which could otherwise be spent on pupil education. We will pursue outstanding debt after a pupil leaves one of our academies.

In individual cases of hardship, the Head teacher may, at their discretion, agree a repayment plan with parents in order to recover a debt. In the event that the agreed repayment plan is not followed, the conditions laid out in the remainder of this policy will apply.

Making payments

All parents / carers must set up an account with our electronic payment system (e.g. *Arbor* or *ParentPay*) through which they will pay for any school club, activity or resource for which there is a charge. This includes charges associated with school dinners.

We expect all payments to be made in advance. Our academy is cash-free and payments must be made via the school online payment system (*Arbor* or *ParentPay*).

All parents / carers must set up an account with their school's online payment system through which they will pay for school meals, clubs, extended care, activity or resources for which there is a charge. The school will not involve itself in any interparental disputes over who should make payments.

Office staff will be able to advise and assist parents who may have difficulties in setting up an account. The office will make alternative arrangements to collect payments should the electronic system be unavailable.

On the occasions where a refund has been approved, they will be issued back via our electronic payment system.

School dinner money

Where a pupil is not entitled to a free school meal, the cost of the meal is charged via our online payment system for each day the pupil attends the academy.

Pupil absence is recorded in line with our [Attendance policy](#) (available on our website). Where a child is marked as absent from school on the attendance register, parents will not be charged.

The academy office will monitor any accounts that are in debt.

Where a debt arises the following procedure will be followed: -

1. Where payment has not been received for 2 weeks of lunches or activities, a reminder will be sent to parents via text or e-mail.
2. If payment or response from parent / carer has not been received after a further week, the next reminder will be sent requesting immediate payment or for a payment plan to be set up. At this stage, no further meals or activities will be provided to the pupil until the debt is cleared and parents will be asked to provide a packed lunch for their child.
3. If the debt is not cleared and the parent / carer does not engage, they will be contacted by a member of the school's team to discuss the situation and referral to the head teacher where necessary
 - a. In the case of school meals, the parent / carer is expected to provide their child with a packed lunch during this time.
 - b. Should a parent / carer send their child to the academy with no packed lunch they will be contacted by the office to remind them to bring one in that day.
 - c. If the parents / carers cannot be contacted or do not provide a lunch, then the pupil will be provided with a basic meal however if the parents / carer fails to provide a packed lunch over three or more days this may be flagged as a safeguarding concern issue and will be referred to our safeguarding team.
4. If the debt is outstanding once a pupil leaves the school, the head teacher may opt to pursue the outstanding debt through the small claims court.

Changing meal provision

Lunch arrangements can be changed on a half-termly basis.

Parents should notify the academy office at least five school days before the end of each half term if they wish to change their lunch arrangements from school dinner to packed lunch or vice versa (regardless of whether they are otherwise entitled to a Free School Meal) so that amendments can be made ready for the first lunch time after the school holidays.

Possible charges relating to packed lunch

Parents / carers whose children usually bring in a packed lunch will be contacted should their child arrive without one and will be reminded they need to arrange to bring one in that day.

Where parents / carers are contacted but are unable to return to the academy with a packed lunch, the office will give them the option of the academy providing their child with a school dinner for that day and the parent / carer will be charged.

Where parents cannot be contacted or do not agree to the alternative of a school dinner for which they will be charged, then the pupil will be provided with a basic meal. The frequency this occurs will be monitored.

Pupils whose parents / carers have chosen to provide them with a packed lunch where they would otherwise be entitled to a Free School Meal will be provided with a school dinner on the occasions where the packed lunch has been forgotten and the parent is unable to be contacted. The frequency this occurs will be monitored as changing meal provision to regular Free School Meals may be a suitable alternative.

Safeguarding

Our academies have a statutory duty of care towards its pupils and it should be noted that, where appropriate, families may be referred to our safeguarding team where the continued lack of payment or provision of a meal for their child causes a concern.