



# Debt Recovery Policy

THE  
**C**  **MPASS**  
PARTNERSHIP OF SCHOOLS

## Overview

- 1.0 The Compass Partnership of Schools ("The Trust") recognises that the physical and emotional wellbeing of the children in its care is of paramount importance. The Trust however has a legal and moral obligation to apply the resources it receives fairly, for the benefit of all pupils, and is not in a position to subsidise any one child or group of children. It has therefore adopted a debt recovery policy aimed at supporting parents/carers in avoiding accumulation of debts in relation to services within its schools such as school dinners, after school activity clubs, breakfast and extended day clubs. Parents/carers are expected to pay in advance for services provided by the school and this can be paid using the online payment system, Agora.
- 1.1 All debts owed to a school including those due from parents/carers have an impact on the school budget as the school has to meet the actual costs incurred. This means that any money owed to the school diminishes the resources that can be provided to all children. We hope that parents/carers understand this and that they will make every effort to avoid owing the school money.

## School meals debt

- 2.0 It is the duty of parents/cares, not the school, to provide a midday meal for their child. Parents/carers may take their child home to discharge this obligation but if they elect to leave the child on the school site during the lunch period, they must either provide a packed lunch for the child or request that the school provide a lunch. Parents/carers whose child is not entitled to Free School Meals are expected to pay for these in advance. The Trust reserves the right not to provide a school meal in circumstances where payment has not been made.

If parents/carers believe their child may be eligible for Free School Meals, please contact the school office for more details. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that parents/carers use it if they qualify. We will help parents/carers with their application as required to find out if they are eligible.

- 2.1 If a parent/carer genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of 5 meals. However, this accrued debt must be paid within one week and future meals must be paid for in advance before any meal is provided. If the debt is not cleared, parents should either provide a packed lunch or take the child home for lunch. In a case where a debt payment is neither received within the allowed time nor a packed lunch provided, the school office will telephone the parents/carers requesting that they come to the school to make an immediate payment.
- 2.2 The Trust reserves the right to begin legal proceedings against the parents/carers to recover the debt. Children's Social Services may also be informed that these parents are not carrying out their responsibility of care by not providing food for their child at lunchtime. See below for the recovery timetable.

## Debt recovery

- 3.0 The Compass Partnership of Schools will take all reasonable measures to vigorously collect debt as part of its management of public funds. The Trust's debt recovery policy will observe the relevant financial regulations and any other legal requirements.

## Acceptable 'Credit Period'

- 4.0 The Trust has determined that one half term is an acceptable 'credit settlement period' before debt recovery procedures are applied.

## Reporting of outstanding debt levels

- 5.0 The Head Teacher will ensure that the level of outstanding debt is regularly monitored. Suitable records will be maintained to detail individual debts and the total value of debt to the school in order that it can be determined at any time and reported to the School's Local Governing Body. The Local Governing Body will review the level of outstanding debts every term to determine whether this level is acceptable and whether action to recover debts is effective.

## Debt Recovery Procedures

- 6.0 Where payment from the parents/carers has not been received in advance, or at the end of the first week, the following process will be applied:
- An initial reminder will be sent to parents/carers by letter and a text will be sent to the parents/carers informing them of the letter. A reminder is sent a maximum of 14 days after the original debt remains unpaid after the due date.
  - If the debt remains unpaid after a further 7 days, the school will contact the parents/carers by telephone.
  - A second formal reminder letter will be issued 2 weeks after the initial reminder. If action is to proceed further, it is necessary to prove that all reasonable attempts have been made to recover the debt, and that these attempts have been made in a timely manner, i.e. at the time the debt first became overdue.
  - If there is no response to the second formal reminder letter the parents/carers will be invited to meet the Head Teacher to discuss how the debt will be settled. An official invoice may be issued for the full amount at the discretion of the Local Governing Body. This will trigger the Trust's recovery process and may be referred to the legal department. The parents/carers may be advised that they will be required to pay in

advance going forward. The decision and its basis will be recorded and reported to the Local Governing Body and the parents/carers.

- Within 10 days a of the second formal reminder letter a decision should be made regarding further activity, which may include legal action.

## The recovery timetable

7.1

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>TOTAL DAYS</b>	<b>ELAPSED DAYS</b>
<b>Invoice</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Reminder</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Telephone Call</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Final Reminder</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Within 10 days a decision should be made regarding further activity, which may include legal action.</b>		

## Negotiation or repayment terms

8.0 Parents/carers in debt to the school are expected to settle the amount by a single payment as soon as possible after receiving the initial reminder. If they are unable to pay the school may reduce or cancel a debt in certain circumstances. A sensitive approach to debt recovery will be taken and the following factors will be considered:

- Hardship – where paying the debt would cause financial hardship
- Ill health – where our recovery action might cause further ill health
- Time – where the debt is large compared to the person's income and it would take an unreasonable length of time to discharge in full
- Cost – where the value of the debt is less than the cost of recovering it
- Multiple debt – where someone owes more than one debt to the school. In this situation, an attempt to agree one repayment plan to include all debts will be established.

- 8.1 Repayment terms may be negotiated at the discretion of the Head Teacher. A record of all such agreements entered will be retained.
- 8.2 In all cases a letter will be issued to the parents/carers confirming the agreed terms for repayment. The settlement period should be the shortest that is judged reasonable.

## Bad Debts

The write-off any debt up to £250 requires the written approval of the Local Governing Body. Debts above £250 will be referred to the Trust Business Committee. A record of the write-off, the reason for it, and the approval will be recorded in the minutes of the Local Governing Body. Similarly, the decisions of the Trust Business Committee, regarding referrals to it, shall be recorded in its minutes.

## Monitoring, evaluation and review

The Board of Trustees will assess the implementation and effectiveness of this policy. The policy will be promoted and implemented throughout each of the schools of the Trust.

This Policy will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees on a three-yearly cycle and must be signed by the Chair of the Board of Trustees and Chief Executive Officer.

Adherence to the policy will be monitored by the school's local governing body.

Policy adopted:	Spring Term 2019
Aligned for:	School Name
Other related policies:	
Next Review:	Spring Term 2022
Signature of Chair of the Board of Trustees:	Signature of Chief Executive Officer: