



Parental Debt Policy

This policy outlines Discovery Schools Academy Trust commitment to preventing parental debts occurring and the process to follow if debts do occur.

Version number	V3
Consultation groups	Extended Services Manager/Office Managers/Headteachers
Approved by	Trust Leader
Approval date	30 September 2022
Implementation date	1 September 2022
Policy/document owner	Assistant Finance Director
Status	Regulatory
Frequency of review	Every 3 years
Next review date	September 2025
Applicable to	This policy applies to all Discovery schools and their parents. The Headteacher is responsible for ensuring that this policy is followed and that all reasonable steps are taken to prevent debts occurring.

Document History

Version	Version Date	Author	Summary of Changes
V0.1 (draft)	03/09/2018	Finance Director	Update and review of Sept 17 draft – Consultation with SBM/OM's took place in 17/18 but official sign off had been obtained.
V0.2	12/08/22	Wrap Around Care Manager	Consultation
V3	12/08/2022	Assistant Finance Director	Update and review of Sept 22 draft – Consultation with SBM/OM's took place in 21/22 but official sign off had been obtained.

Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Prevention	4
3. Debt Recovery	4
4. Review	5

1. Introduction

- Discovery Schools Academies Trust (Discovery) has adopted a clear '**no debt**' policy relating to the school meals and other services such as wrap around care. Schools in the Trust should aim to work with and support parents/carers to both prevent debts occurring and recover monies that are owed to the trust. By achieving this, the Trust can ensure that its funds are used to ensure maximum impact for pupils' teaching and learning and wellbeing.

2. Prevention

The key is to prevent the debt occurring in the first instance which can be achieved using the following methods:

- Make the payment process easy for the parent/carer
- Always request payment in advance
- Use a payment system (ie Parent Pay) so that dinners cannot be ordered without payment
- If dinner money is not received on the day, call the parent/carer in the morning to request payment to be made by lunchtime (via Parent Pay or dropping it into the school) or alternatively deliver a packed lunch for the child prior to lunchtime.
- If the parent cannot pay on the day, arrange a payment plan whereby the debt will be recovered by the end of the following week
- Refer to this policy in the pupil agreement
- Encourage parents to use child care voucher schemes for wrap around care
- Start sending no debt policy message to parents in Foundation stage.

3. Debt Recovery

Inevitably not all debts can be prevented using the techniques above, where the debt is not recovered by the end of the following week the following procedure should be undertaken:

1. Call parents to discuss the possibility of Pupil Premium eligibility (for diner debts). If eligible:
 - Ensure parent/carer is aware of benefits to both them and their child
 - Reassure the parent/carer that this benefit will be discreet and other children will not be made aware
 - Offer support in completing the paperwork
 - Offer an incentive such as a free school uniform for next year
2. Offer affordable payment plan that will ensure debt is recovered by the end of the academic year
3. Add a reminder to letters home relating to trips etc to make clear that all debts should be cleared prior to considering voluntary contributions for trips.

Where parents are not engaging with the school, the following mechanisms are recommended:

- Arrange for child to be picked up from the Reception so that the above discussion cannot be avoided
- Write to the parent/carer to threaten legal action (see template letter)
- Write to parent/carer to threaten a referral to Social Services based on neglect. Please consult with the Finance Director before using this option

- Process the claim through the small claims court (debt should be £175 and above to justify the approx. £100 fee). Please note that this option is only viable if parent/carer is in employment.

Please be mindful that the actions above need to be completed promptly to allow for deliberate delays and those children who will be due to leave the school in year 6.

In addition to the above, it is important to have the appropriate financial controls in place to ensure you can recover the debt successfully. Key controls to consider are:

- Accurate registers
- Issuing receipts upon payment
- Booking forms (for wrap around care)

4. Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by Discovery to assess its effectiveness, and will be updated as necessary. Significant changes will be presented to the CEO for approval.

Dear Parent/Carer of [insert name here]

Our records show you have not paid [enter payment item] for your child.

As at [date] our records show a debt of **£X**

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately by sending it to the school office.

Since non-payment for [ENTER DEBT ITEM, e.g *dinner debt, wac debt*] affect the quality of service to the children, we need to ensure that all payments are up-to-date and I am afraid that if you have not made any attempt to pay this debt by **[DATE TO BE ADDED]** **it will not be possible to provide your child with a [enter service e.g *school meals, wrap around care*] until this debt is paid.**

The school reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the debt.

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

Yours sincerely,