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## DINNER MONEY DEBT PROCEDURE

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Date of Next Review: Summer 2024

Responsible Officer(s): CEO

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## 1. Statement of Intent

Vision Academy Learning Trust is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all pupils, regardless of financial circumstances, and has established the following policy and procedures to ensure that no child is discriminated against.

The governing board is responsible for ensuring that school meal provisions are accessible to all pupils and that procedures are in place for the recovery of any outstanding debt.

This policy has been adopted to ensure that there is a consistent and fair approach to debt incurred by parents whose children eat school meals. The responsibility falls on the school to pursue instances of non-payment.

The school budget will be directly affected by any outstanding debts that cannot be recovered, thereby directly affecting all pupils in school. We are confident that every parent will agree that this is unacceptable, and we encourage that all parents give this policy their full support.

## 2. Legal framework

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

- The Education Act 1996
- The Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014
- DfE (2018) 'Charging for school activities'
- DfE (2020) 'Governance handbook'
- The trust's Funding Agreement

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Complaints Procedures Policy
- Debt Recovery Policy
- Charging and Remissions Policy
- Whole-School Food Policy

## 3. Charging for school meals

School meals are available to pupils at a cost of or at no cost to those in receipt of FSM entitlement – see details of FSM entitlement [below](#).

Payment for school meals are made at the [beginning of the week](#) that the meals are required and can be made [weekly](#), [fortnightly](#), [monthly](#) or when the account nears zero. Payment can be made using [our online payment system](#).

#### **4. Free school meals (FSM)**

There is a statutory right to FSM for families who meet certain criteria. It is important that all parents who qualify take up their entitlement so that their child can receive a school meal each day.

Parents who receive one or more of the following support payments are entitled to receive FSM (assuming the parent does not receive working tax credit):

- Universal Credit
- 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 guaranteed element of pension credit
- Child tax credit (provided they are not also entitled to working tax credit and have an annual gross income of no more than the current threshold)
- Working tax credit run-on – paid for four weeks after they stop qualifying for working tax credit

As of 1 April 2018, all existing FSM claimants will receive FSM whilst Universal Credit is rolled out. This will apply even if their earnings rise above the new threshold during that time. In addition, any pupil who is eligible for FSM after 1 April 2018 is protected against losing FSM during the Universal Credit rollout period.

Once Universal Credit is fully rolled out, any existing claimants that no longer meet the eligibility criteria at that point (because they are earning above the threshold or are no longer a recipient of Universal Credit) will continue to receive FSM until the end of their current phase of education. The Universal Credit rollout is currently expected to be completed in March 2022.

A pupil is only eligible to receive FSM when a claim for FSM has been made on their behalf and their eligibility has been verified by the school.

The responsibility for checking the eligibility of applicants for FSM rests with the school; however, the school may choose to work with the LA to carry out these checks via their eligibility checking system.

The school and LA, where appropriate, should record the date on which they receive the initial application for FSM from a parent. Eligibility checks are carried out promptly to ensure that the most accurate and up-to-date information is being utilised.

## 5. Management of school meal debts

Where there is an outstanding payment yet to be received and the acceptable credit period has been surpassed, an invoice will be created outlining the value and reason for the debt, as well as the debtor's identity.

Upon creating the invoice and stipulating a date on which it must be paid by, the school acknowledges that the debt has been set up via letter or email.

### Steps of management of debt

**Initial verbal reminder** – e.g. informal correspondence via telephone notifying the person of debt (date and time should be officially recorded).

**First formal written reminder** – an official, dated letter addressed to the debtor is written up **two weeks** after the first informal reminder and acknowledges that it took place.

**Second formal written reminder** – this is sent **two weeks** after the second reminder, citing the details of both previous reminders and stating that concerted efforts have been made to make the person aware that an outstanding debt is overdue.

If these reminders are not responded to, another letter is sent to the debtor advising them that the case has been referred to the school's legal advisors and governing board. These parties agree on a timeframe for a repayment or, if necessary, a payment plan for separate instalments.

The school expects that the debt should be repaid as soon as possible, particularly after repeated reminders; however, this can be negotiated at the discretion of the governing board.

If there is a case where the debtor is deemed to be refusing to pay without sufficient reason, the school may consider involving the LA's legal services to resolve the issue and recuperate owed funds.

## 6. Exceptional circumstances and remissions

The school ensures that parents of pupils are aware of the help the school can extend to those in financial difficulty. Parents who may be eligible for remissions are those in receipt of any of the benefits outlined in [section 3](#) of this policy.

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 of the different types of bursaries available should be sent to the debtor in question.

The governing board is not guaranteed, but may decide, to waive or reduce the outstanding debt in these circumstances.

## 7. Monitoring and review

This policy is reviewed bi-annually by the Chief Financial Officer. The next scheduled review date for this policy is Summer 2024.