



## **Atlantic Centre of Excellence Multi Academy Trust**

### **School Meals Debt Recovery Policy**

<b>Date Adopted:</b>	<b>16 March 2018</b>
<b>Date to be Reviewed:</b>	<b>Spring Term 2020</b>

This policy has been written to help our academies to adopt a consistent approach to debt. It provides clarity and consistency in managing debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

There have been many discussions around whether a child should be refused a meal in school if they have not paid. However an academy meal service is no different than any other business and the meals must be paid for by someone.

Parents can easily relate to the situation that they cannot take their child to a restaurant and expect for them to be given food without paying, yet a minority of parents expect free food in school. The Free Schools Meals system is there for parent who cannot afford school meals, there should be no excuses. Applying for Free Schools Meals is straight forward and, once parents have applied and eligibility is authorised, the child can take a free school meal the following day.

The system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach. It may seem a very hard stance in a school where there is a culture of debt tolerance. Although this will be tough to implement it will become easy to maintain once parents realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for Free School Meals (FSM) entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for. The academies' ParentPay system highlights debt immediately so keeping track is easy.

#### **Establishing a debt policy**

Academies should first discuss this policy with staff and the LAB. Parents should then be made aware of the policy through:

- An advisory letter
- The academy's newsletter
- The academy's website

This will ensure that all parents get the same message in a consistent way. This policy should be shared at least once a year and all parents should be given a copy of the policy when their child joins the academy. The policy statement for parents is found as appendix 1 of this document.

## **Debt policy implementation**

### **Key Information**

1. All parents are provided with a copy of the debt policy when their child joins the academy
2. All school lunches must be paid for in advance
3. No child should be sent to school with no money on their ParentPay account and expect to be given a meal
4. Parents who don't want their child to have a school lunch should provide a healthy packed lunch or arrange to take them home for lunch

### **Level 1**

Indicator: A child's account goes into debt

- Check 1            is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
- Check 2            is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3            does this parent normally pay on time, is this just a one off?

### **Action 1: send a 'Gentle debt reminder' (Appendix 2)**

This letter is already set up for you to use in ParentPay. Run it instantly in Pupils>Mail merge

### **Level 2**

Indicator: A child comes to school again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch

- Check 1            is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
- Check 2            is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3            has this parent made contact?

### **Action 2: Personal contact**

Someone will phone the parent to ask them to either bring money or pay online or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime or arrange to take their child home at lunchtime.

### **Level 3**

Indicator: The parent does not comply with any of the options outlined in Action 2

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
- Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3 has this parent made contact?

**Action 3: send 'Stong debt reminder' (Appendix 3)**

The Head will send a final letter. This too is set-up in ParentPay

**Level 4**

Indicator: The parent consistently does not comply with any of the options outlines in Action 2

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
- Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 3 has this parent made contact?

**Action 4: bring in outside agencies**

Academy to notify Social Services who will initiate further action

Date Adopted	16 March 2018
Date for Review	Spring 2020

## **Appendix 1**

### **School Meals Deal Policy Statement**

The Atlantic Centre of Excellence Multi Academy Trust has adopted a strict no debt policy relating to the school meals service.

If debts are incurred then the academy budget has to pay for them. This means that money which should have been 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.

No parent would take their child to a restaurant and expect them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school. If parents believe that their child may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals, please complete the online form on the Cornwall Council website by visiting [www.cornwall.gov.uk/education-and-learning/schools-and-colleges/school-meals/application-for-free-school-meals-and-pupil-premium](http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/education-and-learning/schools-and-colleges/school-meals/application-for-free-school-meals-and-pupil-premium). This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. Help is available with your application; please contact the academy office for more details.

Parents must pay in advance for a school lunch, ideally using the academy's ParentPay system. Children will not be provided with a school lunch unless it is paid for, except those that are entitled to Free School Meals. If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the academy may grant a debt allowance of 1 meal. However this debt must be paid with 1 week and future meals must be paid for in advance before any meal is provided.

For non-payment days, where the academy is unable to contact the parents, and therefore has to provide the child with a lunch, the academy will provide the child with a standard meal (ie whatever is on the menu that day). If, however, it is discovered that the child has forgotten to bring a packed lunch after the school has finished serving the main meal the academy's kitchen will do their best to provide them with a cold lunch (ie sandwiches and fruit).

## Appendix 2

Dear Parent/Carer

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child \*\*\*\*\* in class \*\*.

As at \*\*\*\*\* your account is showing a debt of £\*.\*\*

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately. Once the debt is cleared, please ensure that the account is always in credit.

You have 2 ways to pay:

1. In the secure online payment system through ParentPay, using the login already provided, go to [www.parentpay.com](http://www.parentpay.com). NB THIS IS OUR PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD. Your username and password are as follows:

**Username: \*\*\*\*\***

**Password: \*\*\*\*\***

2. Send in money to the academy office in a marked envelope

No matter how much you pay you can check the account balance at any time by logging into your ParentPay account at [www.parentpay.com](http://www.parentpay.com). You can see what meals have been taken and when.

The cost of a school meal is £2.30 per day and £11.50 per week.

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

Yours faithfully/sincerely

Headteacher

### Appendix 3

Dear Parent/Carer

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child, \*\*\*\*\* (Class \*\*) despite a previous written reminder and a telephone call.

As at \*\*\*\*\* your account is showing a debt of £\*.\*\*

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately. You have 2 ways to pay:

1. In the secure online payment system through ParentPay, using the login already provided, go to [www.parentpay.com](http://www.parentpay.com). NB THIS IS OUR PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD. Your username and password are as follows:

**Username: \*\*\*\*\***

**Password: \*\*\*\*\***

2. Send in money to the academy office in a marked envelope

No matter how much you pay you can check the account balance at any time by logging into your ParentPay account at [www.parentpay.com](http://www.parentpay.com). You can see what meals have been taken and when.

The cost of a school meal is £2.30 per day and £11.50 per week.

Since non-payment for schools meals affects the quality of service we offer to the children, we need to ensure that all payments are up to date and I am afraid that if the debt is not cleared by the end of this week it will not be possible to provide your child with a school meal. You will need to make your own arrangements for your child's lunch.

The academy reserves the right to begin legal proceedings to recover the debt and to inform Social Services of our concerns that you are not providing a meal for your child at lunch time.

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

Yours faithfully/sincerely

Headteacher