

West Town Lane Academy School Meal Provisions and Debt Management Policy

Date policy last reviewed: March 2026

Statement of intent

West Town Lane Academy 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 encourage that all parents give this policy their full support.

1. 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
- Charging and Remissions Policy
- Whole-school Food Policy

2. Charging for school meals

School meals are available to pupils at a cost of £2.50 or at no cost to those in receipt of FSM entitlement or in years Reception to Year 2

Payments will be expected from parents for school meals in advance of the meals being required. Payments can be made when the account nears zero. Payment can be made using our online payment system, credit card or Cash

Where parents make payments in cash, they will deposit the money to the school office

3. 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 will be 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

A pupil will only be eligible to receive FSM when a claim for FSM has been made on their behalf and their eligibility has been verified by the school. Parents will take responsibility for ensuring that they have claimed FSM for their child and will be aware that the entitlement to FSM cannot be backdated.

The school will check the eligibility of all applicants for FSM, working with the LA wherever necessary, and will record the date on which they receive the initial application for FSM from a parent and the date on which eligibility is verified. Eligibility checks are carried out promptly to ensure that the most accurate and up-to-date information is being used.

4. Management of school meal debts

School meals are ordered each day and the Debt applied to a child's account. Parents can see the balance on Arbor

The steps of debt management are as follows:

- **Initial verbal reminder** – The school will contact the parent, via text message or phone call with the outstanding balance
- **First formal written reminder** – the school will send an official, dated letter addressed to the parent one week after the first informal reminder, acknowledging that the informal reminder took place
- **Second formal written reminder** – the school will send a second formal reminder one week after the first formal reminder, citing the details of both previous reminders and stating that concerted efforts have been made to make the parent aware that an outstanding debt is overdue. At this stage the pupil will not be allowed to have a school dinner.
- **Third formal written reminder**- the school will send a third formal reminder one week after the Second formal reminder, citing the details of the previous reminder. The letter will inform the parents that a Statutory demand for payment will be issued in one week if payment or a payment plan has not been received
- **Statutory Payment Plan issues**

The school will work with the parent to establish, and agree on, a timeframe for a repayment or, if necessary, a payment plan for separate instalments.

The school will inform parents that debts should be repaid as soon as possible, particularly after repeated reminders; however, delayed payments can be negotiated in exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the governing board.

The school will ensure that a written record is kept of the date and time all reminders are sent and any responses to those reminders, including informal reminders.

5. Exceptional circumstances and remissions

The school will ensure that parents of pupils are aware of the help the school can extend to those in financial difficulty.

The governing board will consider, on a case-by-case basis, whether to waive or reduce the outstanding debt in these circumstances.

6. Monitoring and review

This policy is reviewed annually by the governing board or headteacher. The next scheduled review date for this policy is March 2027

Any changes to this policy will be communicated to all parents and relevant stakeholders.