

Dinner Money Policy

Author/Owner	Mr P Wilkinson, Chief Finance Officer
Version	V9
Approved By	Finance and Operations Committee
Date Policy Reviewed	July 2026
Next Review Date	September 2027
Academy to implement without Amendment, using appendix when required	



Summary of Changes from Previous Version

Version	Date	Author	Summary of Updates
V7	September 2024	P Wilkinson	Policy updated in line with Trust branding. Section 2, cost of meal updated to £2.90
V8	August 2025	P Wilkinson	Section 2, cost of meal updated to £2.95
V9	July 2026	S Foster	Section 5, policy updated line with Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026 to include the wording – The Trust recognises that the welfare of the child is paramount. Where there are safeguarding concerns or exceptional circumstances, the academy may provide a meal at its discretion whilst appropriate arrangements are made with parents or external agencies.



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1. Introduction

This policy has been created to assist academies or schools within Exceed Learning Partnership to adopt a consistent approach to dinner money debt that has been incurred by parents whose children take school dinners. It provides clarity and consistency in managing the debt and will also help parents to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.

2. Payment for School Meals

- As of September 2025 the cost of a school meal in all Exceed Primary Schools is **£2.95** per day = £14.50 per week.
- Parents/Carers are expected to pay for school meals **in advance on a Monday morning each week** or if they wish may pay up to a term in advance if more convenient.
- Academies within the Trust operate an online payment system called Parent Pay. Parents/Carers are provided with log in details and are encouraged to use this system to make their school meal payments. Parents/Carers are asked to contact the academy office if they have misplaced their details.
- For parents/carers should contact the academy if they have any issues accessing the online system payment system.
- If a child is absent, the dinner money is credited for the following week.
- Refunds may only be given for credits at the end of a term, or if a child is leaving this school.
- Menus are available to view on both the academy website and via Parent Pay
- If a child forgets their packed lunch, a meal may be provided by the academy, however parents/carers will be contacted and the meal **must** be paid on the same day or the following morning at the latest (this does not apply for children in receipt of Free School Meals)
- The office must be given two week's notification in writing of any changes in meal arrangements.

3. Free School Meals

Parents/Carers who are in receipt of certain benefits, may be entitled to Free School Meals. These include:

- Income Support
- Income Based Jobseekers Allowance
- Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Child Tax Credit (Not Working Tax Credit)
- Pension Credit Guarantee and be in receipt of Child Tax Credit above the basic family element
- Universal Credit
- Working Tax credit run on – (paid for 4 weeks after the working tax credit has ceased)

Children who get paid these benefits directly, instead of through a parent or guardian, can also get free school meals.

If you are in receipt of one of the benefits above your child may be entitled to receive free school meals, it is essential that parents/carers apply for this at the same time as applying for benefits.



To apply for free school meals please log onto <http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals> Please note children will not be given a free meal until confirmation has been received from Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council of their entitlement.

Children who prefer to have a packed lunch but who are entitled to Free School meals must still notify the school office if changing from one to another.

4. Universal Infant Free School Meals

All children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 (Key Stage 1) are entitled to receive a Universal Infant Free School Meal however they will need to complete a registration form which are available from the academy office.

Even though a child is entitled to receive a universal infant free school meal, parents/carers who receive benefits are asked to also register on the free school meal website with the local authority, this will ensure that their details are included in the information that is used to calculate the **Pupil Premium Funding** which schools receive as part of their annual funding.

This funding is used to provide resources throughout the academies to support children in their education and learning journey ensuring that they achieve their full potential. If a parent/carer is entitled to receive free school meals but does not register their entitlement this will impact on the amount of Pupil Premium Funding that the academy receives.

5. Debt Policy

We request that all parents give this policy their full support. If debts are incurred, the academy will have to cover the cost of the meals taken. This will mean that money which should be spent on the children's education has to be used for debts incurred by parents.

- Exceed Learning Partnership operates a strict **NO DEBT** policy relating to meals taken within their academies.
- The cost of school dinners should be paid for in advance - at the beginning of each week or on a daily basis if this is more suitable for parent/carers.
- Children may not be provided with a school meal unless it is paid for in advance (except for those children entitled to Free School Meals or Key Stage 1 children). However, the Trust recognises that the welfare of the child is paramount. Where there are safeguarding concerns or exceptional circumstances, the academy may provide a meal at its discretion whilst appropriate arrangements are made with parents or external agencies.
- If a parent/carer genuinely forgets to pay, the school may grant an exception and allow for payment to be made. This debt must be paid the same day or by the morning of the next day at the very latest and all future meals must be paid for in advance.
- Parents/Carers who incur debts will be contacted. If the debt is not cleared, they will be informed that the academy can no longer provide a meal, they will be instructed to provide their child with a packed lunch or to make arrangements to take them home for their lunch. In a case when a debt payment is not received, nor a packed lunch provided, the academy will telephone the parent or carer asking them to bring the money to school immediately, provide sandwiches before lunch or take the child home for lunch.
- Social Care may be informed that Parents/Carers are not carrying out their responsibility of care by not providing food for their child at lunchtime.
- If a reasonable arrangement to clear a debt cannot be made, the academy/trust reserves the



right to begin legal proceedings to secure payment.

- We hope that by implementing this debt policy we are able to help parents manage school dinner money better and ensure that all money provided for children's' learning is used for that purpose

Policy Reviewed: July 2026

Signed CEO: *B.A. Nixon*

Signed Chair of Directors: *Pat Hagan*

Policy to be reviewed: September 2027



Appendix 1 – Key Information

- All parents will be provided with a copy of the Dinner Money and Debt Policy when their child joins the school.
- All school lunches must be paid for in advance no child should be sent to school without money or credit in their account and expect for a meal to be given.
- Parents who do not want their child to have a school lunch are asked to provide a healthy packed lunch.

Debt Policy Implementation

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'

Level 2

Indicator: ***A child comes to school again without the debt identified at level 1 being paid or a packed lunch***

- Check 1: is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
- Check 2: has this parent made contact with the academy?

Action 2: Personal contact

Contact will be made by phone to the parent to ask them to either bring the money into school or bring sandwiches in before lunchtime

Level 3

Indicator: ***The parent consistently does not comply with any of the above***

- Check 1: has contact been made by the parent following level 1 and 2

Action 3: Send strong debt letter

The Principal will send a final letter.

Consider options available to retrieve the outstanding debt i.e. invoice/outside agencies if parent does not respond to the final letter.

Please note that should there be any changes/further national guidance issued relevant to this policy, it will be updated accordingly prior to the review date shown above and referred to the next Trust Board meeting.



Appendix 2 – Example Letter

Dear Parents / Carers

Re: School Meals Policy

Exceed Learning Partnership has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy relating to school meals, for all of the academies within the Multi Academy Trust.

If debts are incurred, then the school budget has to pay for them. This means that money which should be spent on the children's education is used to pay for any unpaid meals. I am sure everybody will agree that this is unacceptable and we hope that all parents give this policy their full support.

If you believe that you may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals, please contact the office for more details. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. We will help you all we can with your application.

School lunches must be paid for in advance using any of the methods of payment outlined below:

- Online at : <https://www.parentpay.com>
- Send cash or cheque in a marked envelope

If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of one meal. However, this debt must be paid next day and future meals must be paid in advanced before any meal is provided.

If the debt is not cleared, parents must provide a packed lunch. In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the office will phone the parent to ask them to come to school with the money or provide sandwiches before lunch time.

If payment of the debt is not received by the next day, the Principal reserves the right to inform the Chair of the Governors or the Trust Directors Finance and Operations Committee who may decide to take proceedings against parents to recover the debt. Social services may also be informed that these parents are not carrying out the responsibility of care by not providing food for their children at lunchtime.

We hope that by implementing this debt policy we are able to help parents manage school dinner money better and at the same time ensure that all the money that is for children's learning is available.

If you have any concerns, please don't hesitate in contacting me.

Yours sincerely

Principal