DEBT MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE

For Parents and Carers

Date of Review: March 2025

Date of Next Review: As updates are required

DEBT MANAGEMENT PROCEDURE

Introduction

This procedure has been written to enable Rise Multi Academy Trust and its schools to adopt a consistent approach to debt management. It provides clarity and consistency in managing debt and will also help our parents understand our expectations and their responsibilities.

The debt management procedure aims are as follows:

- Schools are required to take all reasonable steps to collect debts as part of their duty for the management of public funds.

- This debt management procedure forms part of our strategy to make sure this is achieved.

- Voluntary contributions for activities are out of the scope of this procedure.

- For the purposes of this procedure the term 'parent' refers to any parent, guardian or carer.

Background

- Where debts are allowed to build up, it may become harder for the debtor to pay.

- If a debt is not paid, then funds which are earmarked to be spent on providing the children's education are instead used to subsidise the debt. This is an inappropriate use of public funds.

- Therefore, a key objective of this procedure is to:
  - reduce the risk of burdening parents with large debts
  - ensure the school budget is used to provide educational services for the benefit of pupils

Services for which parents are required to pay

The services provided to pupils which parents are required to pay for include:

- School Meals *(unless a pupil is eligible for either Free School Meals or Universal Infant Free School Meals)*
- Music tuition if extra to the curriculum
- Extra-curricular clubs if chargeable (e.g. after school sports, cooking clubs, art clubs, activity clubs, etc)
- Residential School visits where board and lodging costs are chargeable to parents
- Pre School and nursery charges not covered by government funding

Timing of payments

- Parents should pay for services provided by the school by making payments to their child's account through the online payment system (currently Arbor).

- Separate payment items are listed for each child and for every service (e.g. School Meals, After School Activity Clubs, Trips and Residential visits etc).

- Where possible, payments for residential visits will be split into instalments.

- Parents can choose how frequently they make payments to their Arbor account as long as they ensure they meet the required instalment/pay period timings.

Debt Management Guidance

- Debt recovery procedures will be overseen by the Headteacher/School Administrator, with support from the Trust Finance Department.

- The Headteacher and School Administrators will ensure that the level of outstanding debt is regularly monitored. This is also monitored by the Trust's Finance department.

- Suitable records will be maintained to provide details of individual debts and their total value.

- Where payment has not been made for a particular service, that service will no longer be available to the pupil concerned.

- For school meals, this means that the parent will be requested to provide a packed lunch. A duty meal can be provided where the debt limit, which is approximately equivalent to one week's charges (currently £15), is reached and the pupil has not brought a packed lunch.

- For any chargeable school activity clubs, the child would not be allowed to attend and may lose their place if debts remain unpaid.

- The school may reduce or cancel a debt in certain circumstances, but only with agreement from the Director of Finance or the Director of Operations.

- Advice will be given about Free School Meals/Pupil Premium if appropriate.

- A sensitive approach to debt recovery will be adopted and individual family circumstances will be taken into consideration.

- Any parent experiencing genuine financial hardship is encouraged to discuss this with the School Administrator or the Headteacher.

- Any reasonable request for permission to pay in instalments will be considered, but the total debt must be cleared within a reasonable timescale and ideally before the end of the school academic year.