Diocese of Chelmsford
Vine Schools Trust

Debt Management Policy

This is a mandatory policy for all Vine schools that has been noted and implemented with no amendments by this school.

Policy Reference:	F014 v1.0
Approved by Vine Schools Trust on:	Spring 2026
Adopted by this school on:	Spring 2026
Next review:	Spring 2027

> I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit

JOHN 15:5

Vision & Values

V	**Valuing every person**
I	**Inspiring great teaching**
N	**Nurturing academic excellence and Christian Character**
E	**Excelling, unlocking great potential**

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CONTENTS **PAGE NO:**

1. **Introduction** 4
2. **The Principles** 4
3. **Roles and Responsibilities** 4
4. **The Process for Pursuing Debts (*except dinner money*)** 5
5. **Dinner Money Debts** 7
6. **Waiving of Debts (Bad Debts)** 9
7. **Review** 9
8. **Apendices** 9

Changes to previous edition

Page	Section	Details
Throughout	Throughout	Director of Finance and Operations changed to Chief Financial Operating Officer
Throughout	Throughout	Local School Board changed to School Governance Board
Appendices	Appendices	Admin Coordinator changed to Trust Coordinator
Appendices	Appendices	School Money changed to Arbor

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1. Introduction

This document sets out the Diocese of Chelmsford Vine Schools Trusts approach to debt management. The policy has been created to ensure that appropriate procedures are in place to deal with debts and the recovery of assets, it encompasses all debts owed to the Trust and its Academy's including, but not limited to payments for goods, services, school trips, clubs and school meals.

Parents and carers should be made aware of and given access to this policy and the Trusts procedures. It will be included on the Academy's and Trust website and made available to view at the Academy or Trust on request.

2. The Principles

2.1 Christian character and values

2.1.1 Vine academy's, with a historic Christian character, policies and practice will develop Christian character and reflect the Christian principles and values of the school community. The rights and responsibilities of each person, both as an individual and as a member of the community, will support a policy which reflects Christian character and values. Staff will provide excellent role models.

2.2 Writing Off Debt

2.2.1 The Vine and its academy's will not write off any debt which exceeds £100 except in exceptional circumstances.

2.2.2 The Vine and its academy's will not write off any debts owed by the local authority or other educational establishment(s).

2.3 Records

2.3.1 A full record will be kept of debts owed to Vine academy's and the Trust, for a period of seven years. This will include all letters and electronic communication(s) requesting money, reminders and invoices.

2.4 Legal Advice

2.4.1 Following legal advice, Vine academy's and/or the Trust may initiate legal action to recover debts.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 Executive Officers (Chief Executive Officer or Chief Financial Operating Officer)

3.1.1 Will prescribe and regularly review the arrangements for debt recovery in conjunction with advice provided by internal and external auditors.

3.1.2 Must approve any proposed legal action.

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3.2 Schools Governance Board/Body

3.2.1 Will regularly monitor the level of debt at each academy over which responsibility exists.

3.2.2 When legal action is approved it will be recorded in the minutes of the relevant meeting.

3.2.3 Will adhere to privacy arrangements.

3.2.4 May consider whether services must be paid for in advance where previous debt management procedures have had to be instigated (Section 4.4 refers)

3.2.5 May delegate its responsibilities under this policy to the Executive Headteacher / Headteacher.

3.3 Executive Headteacher/Headteacher

3.3.1 Will ensure that letters and/or electronic communication(s) requesting money are accurately recorded and those records are maintained.

3.3.2 Will ensure that evidence of steps taken by the Academy or Trust in pursuance of debt is recorded including dates and times of letters, electronic communication(s), phone calls and other verbal discussions

3.3.3 Will ensure that a final reminder is sent by recorded delivery to the debtor

3.3.4 Will ensure that family cases are judged fairly and according to the circumstances of the family involved. Furthermore, will support parents and carers to identify eligibility for financial aid and provide assistance in completing any application forms if necessary. The privacy of the family involved will be respected and only made known to those directly involved.

3.3.5 Will ensure that the level of outstanding debt can be determined at any time.

3.3.6 May delegate operational responsibility under this policy to designated employees.

4. The Process for Pursuing Debts (*except dinner money*)

This process generally applies to services provided where an invoice has been raised, with payment terms attached.

4.1 Step 1: Informal Reminder

4.1.1 The debtor will be informally reminded in person or by telephone/text/e-mail that they owe money to the Academy/Trust, on the first working day after payment has become overdue.

4.1.2 Whilst additional informal reminders may be made the date of progression to Step 2 will be determined by the date of the first informal reminder (section

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4.1.1).

4.2 Step 2: First reminder letter

4.2.1 If the debt is not paid within two weeks after the first informal reminder, a formal letter will be sent to the debtor.

4.3 Step 3: Second reminder letter

4.3.1 If the debt is not paid two weeks after a first formal reminder, a second formal letter will be sent to the debtor.

4.3.2 The second reminder letter should provide the debtor every opportunity to settle their debt within seven days and may suggest the debtor contacts the Academy to request an alternative repayment schedule for consideration.

4.3.3 This Step ensures the Academy/Trust can prove all reasonable steps have been taken to recover the debt should the issue proceed further.

4.4 **Step 4: Final reminder letter**

4.4.1 If the debt has not been repaid, or a suitable/realistic repayment proposal agreed, within seven days of the second reminder, the Academy/Trust will send a letter to the debtor advising them that the matter will be referred to the Trust's legal team to consider legal action.

4.4.2 The final reminder will be sent by recorded delivery to ensure the debtor has had every chance to respond.

4.4.3 At this point the debtor may be advised, at the discretion of the Local Schools Board that they will have to pay in advance for certain services in the future.

4.4.4 Alternative repayment proposals must:

4.4.4.1 Include the amount of the debt, the revised term, the frequency or repayments and amount of repayments.

4.4.4.2 Be agreed by all parties in writing.

4.4.4.3 Failure to comply with an alternative repayment schedule will result in immediate escalation to Step 5. And possible legal action considered.

4.4.4.4 The debtor will acknowledge that during the term of the agreed repayment schedule they will not incur any additional debt(s) with the Academy/Trust.

4.4.4.4.1 Failure to comply with 4.4.4.4 will place the agreed alternative repayment schedule into default and immediate escalation to Step 5 (Section 4.5) and legal action considered.

4.5 Step 5: Possible Legal Action

4.5.1 After all reminder letters have been sent, the Executive Headteacher/Headteacher will refer the matter to the Chief Financial

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Operating Officer who in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer will determine the appropriate course of action, which may include legal action against the debtor.

4.5.2 The Executive Headteacher/Headteacher is responsible for ensuring that all evidence in connection with the debt recovery to date is lodged with the Chief Financial Operating Officer.

4.5.3 If legal action is to be taken, instruction will be made by the Vine Central Team.

5. Dinner Money Debts

School dinners should be paid for in advance or on the day that a meal is taken

5.1 Step 1: Reminder

5.1.1 The parent/carer will be reminded daily in person/telephone or by text/e-mail (i.e. cashless catering solution) that they owe dinner money to the Academy/Trust, following the day payment has become due.

5.2 Step 2: First reminder letter/e-mail

5.2.1 If the dinner money debt accumulates beyond the value of three meals, further contact by telephone/text/e-mail will be made and followed up with a letter/e-mail requesting payment within seven days, the letter will refer to;

5.2.1.1 The amount currently owed.

5.2.1.2 The dates and nature (i.e. e-mail, phone text etc.) of contacts made or attempted.

5.2.1.3 The date that full repayment is to be made by.

5.2.1.4 Notify parents that failure to repay dinner money debt may result in them having to provide a packed lunch for their child/ren until the dinner money debt is repaid in full.

5.3 Step 3: Second reminder letter/e-mail

5.3.1 If no satisfactory response is received to Step 2, the parent/carers will be informed that the child/ren **must** be provided with a home packed lunch until the dinner money debt is repaid in full.

5.3.2 The second reminder letter/e-mail should provide the parent/carer every opportunity to settle their debt within seven days and must include

5.3.2.1 The amount currently owed,

5.3.2.2 The date contact has been made and or attempted

5.3.2.3 The date repayment must be made by,

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it may also;

5.3.2.4 Suggest the parent/carer requests an alternative repayment schedule for consideration.

5.3.2.5 Invite the parent/carer to discuss possible support in cases of financial hardship i.e. Free School Meals application(s).

5.3.2.6 Provide a named contact or contacts at the Academy with whom the parent/carer can discuss the matter in confidence with.

5.3.3 The Academy will not allow the debt to build up for the parent/carer and hot school dinners will not be provided until a resolution has been reached.

5.4 **Step 4: Final reminder letter**

5.4.1 If the debt has not been repaid, or a suitable/realistic repayment proposal agreed, within seven days of the second reminder, the Academy/Trust will send a letter to the parent/carer advising them that the matter will be referred to the Trust's legal team to consider legal action.

5.4.2 The final reminder will be sent by recorded delivery to ensure the parent/carer has had every chance to respond.

5.4.3 Alternative repayment proposals should:

5.4.3.1 Include the amount of the dinner money debt, agree the term of repayment, the frequency of repayments and amount of the repayments.

5.4.3.2 Must be agreed by all parties in writing.

5.4.3.3 Failure to comply with an alternative repayment schedule will result in immediate escalation to Step 5. And possible legal action.

5.4.3.4 The debtor will acknowledge that during the term of the agreed repayment schedule they will not incur any additional debt(s) with the Academy/Trust.

5.4.3.4.1 Failure to comply with 5.4.3.4 will place the agreed alternative repayment schedule into default and immediate escalation to Step 5 (Section 5.5) and legal action considered.

5.5 Step 5: Possible Legal Action

5.5.1 After all reminder letters have been sent, the Executive Headteacher/Headteacher will refer the matter to the Chief Financial Operating Officer and Operations who in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer will determine the appropriate course of action, which may include legal action against the parent/carer.

5.5.2 The Executive Headteacher/Headteacher is responsible for ensuring that all

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evidence in connection with the debt recovery to date is lodged with the Director of Finance and Operations.

5.5.3 If legal action is to be taken, instruction will be made by the Vine Central Team.

6. Waiving of Debts (Bad Debts)

6.1 The Vine Trust and its Academy's will pursue all debts.

6.2 A bad debt may be waived when it is believed that the debtor is experiencing serious financial hardship or if all reasonable avenues to recover the debt have been exhausted and it is believed that it would not be cost effective to pursue the debt through legal action.

6.3 The procedure for writing off of exceptional bad debts is contained within the Financial Regulations, section 3.0.

7. Review

7.1 The policy will be reviewed annually or sooner if warranted by internal or external events or changes. The Board of Trustees must approve all changes.

8. Appendices

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FIRST REMINDER LETTER GENERAL DEBT

Mrs A Smith
Address
Address
Post Code

1st January 2023

Dear Mrs Smith,

BREAKFAST CLUB MONEY OWING

Our records show that you currently owe £x.xx for breakfast club. We have tried to contact you via text message and email, using Arbor, to highlight this outstanding payment.

Can I please ask that you pay the amount outstanding, in full, by (enter date 14 days from today).

If you have any queries or need reminding of your Arbor log in details, please contact the School Office.

Yours Sincerely

TRUST CO-ORDINATOR NAME
Trust Co-Ordinator

TRUST CO-ORDINATOR EMAIL ADDRESS
SCHOOL TELEPHONE NUMBER

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SECOND REMINDER LETTER GENERAL DEBT

Mrs A Smith
Address
Address
Post Code

1st January 2023

Dear Mrs Smith,

DINNER MONEY OWING

Following my letter, dated enter date. I have been monitoring Arbor and note that the debt of £x.xx, is still outstanding.

Please repay this debt by (enter date 7 days from today). If would like to discuss this matter in confidence, or agree a repayment schedule please contact me and I will be happy to assist you. I can also discuss possible support for you if you are being affected by financial hardship (i.e. Free School Meals Application (s).

If you have any queries or need reminding of your Arbor log in details, please contact the School Office.

Yours Sincerely

TRUST CO-ORDINATOR NAME
Trust Co-Ordinator

TRUST CO-ORDINATOR EMAIL ADDRESS
SCHOOL TELEPHONE NUMBER

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FINAL LETTER GENERAL DEBT

TO BE SENT BY RECORDED DELIVERY

Mrs A Smith
Address
Address
Post Code

1st January 2023

Dear Mrs Smith,

RECOVERY OF DEBT FOR BREAKFAST CLUB INCOME

We write to you in relation to monies owed by you, to SCHOOL NAME, as regards income from the Breakfast Club. We write further to our correspondence to you, most recently on 1st April 2019.

ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION WHERE NECCESSARY - We understand that you contacted the school further to the above letter, and confirmed your intention to pay the debt. It was confirmed to you that payment would need to be via Arbor. No payment has been received from you.

We are writing to you to offer for you to make payment of the outstanding sums before referring this matter to our Trust Finance Team to consider further action which may include legal action.

At this point you may advise the parent/guardian (at discretion of the School Governance Board) that they will have to pay in advance for certain services in the future.

Actions Required

The full sum of £122.00 should be paid in full within 14 days via the Arbor website. If you need assistance with your log in details, please contact the School Office.

Contact Details

Should you wish to discuss this matter or require support in making this payment please contact me via email (EMAIL ADDRESS) or phone (SCHOOL TELEPHONE NUMBER).
Yours Sincerely,

HEADTEACHERS NAME
Headteacher

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FIRST REMINDER LETTER SCHOOL DINNERS

Mrs A Smith
Address
Address
Post Code

1st January 2023

Dear Mrs Smith,

SCHOOL DINNER MONEY OWING

Our records show that you currently owe £x.xx for school dinners. We have tried to contact you via text message and email, using Arbor, to highlight this outstanding payment.

Please also include the dates and nature of contacts made or attempted.

Can I please ask that you pay the amount outstanding, in full, by (enter date 7 days from today).

Failure to pay the outstanding amount may result in you needing to provide a packed lunch for your child/ren.

If you have any queries or need reminding of your Arbor log in details, please contact the School Office.

Yours Sincerely

TRUST CO-ORDINATOR NAME
Trust Co-Ordinator

TRUST CO-ORDINATOR EMAIL ADDRESS
SCHOOL TELEPHONE NUMBER

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SECOND REMINDER LETTER SCHOOL DINNERS

Mrs A Smith
Address
Address
Post Code

1st January 2023

Dear Mrs Smith,

SCHOOL DINNER MONEY OWING

Following my letter, dated enter date. I have been monitoring Arbor and note that the debt of £x.xx, is still outstanding.

Please also include the dates and nature of contacts made or attempted.

Please repay this debt by (enter date 7 days from today). If would like to discuss this matter in confidence, or agree a repayment schedule please contact me and I will be happy to assist you. I can also discuss possible support for you if you are being affected by financial hardship (i.e. Free School Meals Application (s).

Until the outstanding payment is received in full you must provide your child/ren with a packed lunch.

If you have any queries or need reminding of your Arbor log in details, please contact the School Office.

Yours Sincerely

TRUST CO-ORDINATOR NAME
Trust Co-Ordinator

TRUST CO-ORDINATOR EMAIL ADDRESS
SCHOOL TELEPHONE NUMBER

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FINAL LETTER SCHOOL DINNERS

TO BE SENT BY RECORDED DELIVERY

Mrs A Smith
Address
Address
Post Code

1st January 2023

Dear Mrs Smith,

RECOVERY OF DEBT FOR SCHOOL DINNER MONEY INCOME

We write to you in relation to monies owed by you, to SCHOOL NAME, as regards income from School Dinners. We write further to our correspondence to you, most recently on DATE.

ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION WHERE NECCESSARY - We understand that you contacted the school further to the above letter and confirmed your intention to pay the debt. It was confirmed to you that payment would need to be via Arbor. No payment has been received from you.

We are writing to you to offer for you to make payment of the outstanding sums before referring this matter to our Trust Finance Team to consider action which may include

legal action.

Actions Required

The full sum of £122.00 should be paid in full within 14 days via the School Money website. If you need assistance with your log in details, please contact the School Office.

Contact Details

Should you wish to discuss this matter or require support in making this payment please contact me via email (EMAIL ADDRESS) or phone (SCHOOL TELEPHONE NUMBER).

Yours Sincerely,

HEADTEACHERS NAME
Headteacher

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