St. Anne's and Guardian Angels

Excellence Together with Christ at the Centre

Debt Management and Recovery Policy

Approved by:	St Anne's and Guardian Angels Primary School Governing Body	**Date:** October 2026
Last reviewed:	October 2026	
Next review due by:	October 2028	

1. Purpose and principles

Money owed to the school reduces the funds available to support children's education. This policy sets out how we prevent debts, support families experiencing difficulty and recover unpaid charges fairly and consistently. Our approach reflects our Catholic commitment to dignity, compassion and responsible stewardship of public funds.

We will communicate clearly, act promptly and consider individual circumstances. Parents and carers are encouraged to contact the school office as soon as they anticipate difficulty paying. Discussions about debt will be private and respectful, and children will not be asked to collect payments or carry messages about arrears.

2. Scope and related policies

This policy applies to money lawfully owed to the school, including agreed charges for breakfast and after school clubs, chargeable childcare, permitted activities, residential board and lodging, and other goods or services. References to parents include carers and other adults who have agreed responsibility for the charge. Liability will be checked against the relevant agreement; it will not be assumed solely because an adult has parental responsibility.

Voluntary contributions and donations are not debts and will not be pursued through this policy. Children will not be excluded from activities because their parents have not made a voluntary contribution. Statutory entitlements, applicable remissions and free provision must be respected.

This policy must be read alongside the school's Charging and Remissions Policy, relevant booking terms, the Trust's financial regulations and scheme of delegation, the Complaints Policy and applicable privacy notices. Trust approval requirements take precedence over local decisions.

3. Responsibilities

The school office maintains accurate accounts, issues reminders and records contact and payments.

The Executive Headteacher, supported by the Head of School, oversees recovery, considers hardship and repayment arrangements, and seeks Local Governing Body and/or Trust approval where required.

The Trust finance team advises on referral, legal action and write-offs.

Governors receive termly reports on outstanding balances and recovery action, using anonymised information wherever possible.

4. Preventing and monitoring debt

Charges, payment dates, cancellation terms and any applicable remissions will be explained before a parent agrees to a service. Payment should normally be made in advance or by the stated due date. Instalments must be agreed in writing. Allowing a debt to remain outstanding does not create a right to further credit.

The office will check balances at least weekly during term time and raise concerns promptly. Records will identify the responsible payer, the service, agreed terms, due dates, payments, balance, correspondence and decisions. The Executive Headteacher will review outstanding debts at least monthly, with a summary reported to governors each term.

5. Recovery procedure

The following timetable normally applies once a payment becomes overdue. Days mean calendar days. Each letter must give an exact response date. Deadlines falling during a school closure will allow a reasonable opportunity to contact the office. The Executive Headteacher may extend deadlines where circumstances justify this and will record the reason.

Stage 1 Initial reminder

The office will normally contact the parent within seven days of the missed due date, by telephone, email or in person. Staff will confirm the balance, check for an error or pending payment and invite payment or a discussion about support. The contact will be recorded.

Stage 2 First written reminder

If the debt remains unresolved 14 days after the initial reminder, the office will send a written statement of the amount owed, the service and due dates. The parent will have 14 days to pay, raise a query or request a repayment plan.

Stage 3 Second written reminder

If the first written deadline passes without resolution, a second reminder will allow a further 14 days. It will invite the parent to meet the Executive Headteacher or Head of School and explain that continued non-engagement or failure to agree and maintain repayments may lead to referral to a third-party debt recovery agency.

Stage 4 Final notice and review

If the second deadline passes without resolution, the Executive Headteacher will review the account, contact attempts, any dispute, hardship and support offered. A final notice will give at least 14 days to pay or agree an acceptable plan before any agency referral. It will

state the balance and proposed next action. Referral requires the approval described in section 8.

Where a parent disputes a debt, the school will investigate and provide a written explanation and relevant account information before escalating the disputed amount. Recovery of that amount will be paused during this review. Parents may use the school's Complaints Policy if the matter remains unresolved.

6. Repayment plans and financial hardship

A parent who cannot pay in full should contact the office promptly. The Executive Headteacher or authorised delegate may agree an affordable repayment plan, taking account of the amount owed, family circumstances and a realistic settlement period.

Relevant information may be requested sensitively to help assess affordability.

The written agreement will record the opening balance, instalment amounts, exact payment dates, final payment date, payment method and review arrangements. Both parties will confirm acceptance and the parent will receive a copy. Future chargeable services will normally require advance payment to prevent further arrears.

If a payment is missed, the school will contact the parent to establish why and offer an opportunity to bring the plan up to date or request a review. Where a parent does not engage, or repeatedly fails to comply without agreeing revised terms, the school may proceed to the final notice and agency referral process. A genuine change in circumstances will be considered before escalation.

Support may include checking eligibility for free provision or remissions, adjusting instalments, a temporary pause, or considering a reduction or write-off through the appropriate Local Governing Body/Trust approval route. Relevant factors include hardship, ill health, vulnerability, the likely repayment period and whether recovery costs would exceed the amount recoverable. Families may be signposted to free independent debt advice, such as Citizens Advice or StepChange.

7. Access to chargeable services

To prevent further debt, the school may require advance payment or suspend future access to an optional paid service, subject to its terms and any required notice. The school reserves the right to deny access to chargeable services after issuing 'The First Written Reminder' letter.

The Executive Headteacher will consider the child's welfare, safeguarding needs and family circumstances before deciding. Any restriction will be confirmed in writing, explaining the reason, effective date and arrangements for review or reinstatement.

Children will not be denied education or statutory entitlements because of a debt. The school will not withdraw an entitled free meal, funded childcare entitlement or a curriculum activity because a parent owes money. Voluntary contributions will never be treated as a condition of participation.

8a. Referral to a third party debt recovery agency

The school may refer an outstanding debt to a reputable third-party debt recovery agency where a parent or carer does not engage with reasonable attempts to resolve it, refuses to agree an acceptable repayment arrangement, or fails to keep to an agreed repayment plan without agreeing revised terms. Referral is discretionary and will normally follow the reminders, review and final written notice set out in this policy.

Before referral, the Executive Headteacher must obtain approval from the Local Governing Body. The decision must record the legal basis of the debt, balance, evidence of agreement, contact history, support offered, any unresolved issues, proportionality and likely recovery costs. Any unresolved dispute must be reviewed before referral.

8b. Referral arrangements

The parent will be told in writing that referral is intended, the amount to be referred, how to avoid referral, the response deadline and which agency will be used once appointed. The school will explain how the agency can be contacted and how payments and queries will be handled. Any subsequent payment must be promptly reconciled to prevent duplicate recovery.

The Trust will check the agency's suitability, conduct, complaints arrangements, security and data protection terms before appointment. The agency must treat families fairly and sensitively, take account of vulnerability and avoid misleading, threatening or disproportionate contact. A debt recovery agency is not a court-appointed enforcement agent and referral does not itself authorise entry to a home or seizure of belongings.

Only information necessary for lawful recovery will be shared, through secure means and under appropriate contractual arrangements. The school will identify and document the lawful basis for sharing, ensure privacy information is accurate, and seek advice from its data protection lead where needed. Unnecessary pupil, safeguarding or health information will not be disclosed.

9. Recovery costs and legal action

The school will not automatically add agency fees, interest or administrative charges to a parent's balance, but retains the right to do so. Any additional sum sought must have a valid legal basis and be fair and recoverable under the applicable agreement or court order. Parents will be informed of the basis and amount in writing.

Court proceedings require separate authorisation and appropriate legal advice. The Trust will consider the evidence, proportionality, costs and prospects of recovery. Where applicable, the Pre-Action Protocol for Debt Claims must be followed, including a compliant Letter of Claim, required enclosures and response periods. The school's final referral notice is not a substitute for that process.

10. Debt reduction and write off

Debts may be reduced or written off only by the person or body authorised under the Trust's financial regulations and scheme of delegation, with any further approval or reporting required by the current Academy Trust Handbook. This policy does not create a separate local financial approval limit. Staff must not promise cancellation before approval has been obtained.

The decision record will include the amount, reason, recovery steps, value-for-money assessment and approval. Leaving the school does not by itself cancel an outstanding debt, and a child's transfer or educational records will not be withheld because of unpaid charges.

11. Records communication and review

Financial records, correspondence, repayment agreements and approvals will be held securely, with access limited to staff who need them. Records will be retained and disposed of under the school's retention schedule and applicable legal requirements. Accessible formats, interpretation or reasonable communication adjustments will be offered where needed.

This policy will be made available to parents and reviewed annually, or earlier if requirements or school/Trust arrangements change.

Appendix 1 Written reminder templates

First written reminder

Date: [date]

Dear [parent or carer name],

Our records show an outstanding balance of £[amount] for [service and period], due on [date]. A statement is enclosed. We contacted you about this on [date].

Please pay by [date] using [payment method], or contact the school office by that date if you believe the balance is incorrect or would like to discuss an affordable repayment plan. If you have already paid, please let us know so that we can check our records.

We want to work with you to resolve this. Please contact us privately if financial difficulties are affecting your ability to pay.

Kind regards,
[name and role]

Second written reminder

Date: [date]

Dear [parent or carer name],

We wrote on [date] about the outstanding balance of £[amount] for [service and period]. This remains unpaid according to our records. Please pay or contact the school office by [date] to agree how it will be settled. We can arrange a meeting with the Executive Headteacher or Head of School to discuss any difficulties.

If you do not engage with us or do not maintain an agreed repayment plan, the school may refer the debt to a third-party debt recovery agency after a final written notice and review under our Debt Recovery Policy. Please contact us so that we can work towards a suitable arrangement.

Kind regards,
[name and role]

Final notice before agency referral

Date: [date]

Dear [parent or carer name],

The balance of £[amount] for [service and period] remains outstanding. We previously contacted you on [dates]. [Where relevant, describe the agreed repayment plan, missed payments and attempts to review it.] A current statement is enclosed.

Please pay the balance or contact [name and contact details] by [date allowing at least 14 days] to agree an acceptable repayment arrangement or raise a query. If we do not reach a resolution, the school may refer the debt to [agency name] for recovery, subject to the approval required by the Trust. Necessary information about you and the debt will be shared securely for this purpose, as explained in our privacy information.

If your circumstances have changed, please contact us before the deadline so that we can consider support or revised terms. This is a notice of possible agency referral, not a Letter of Claim commencing the court pre-action process.

Yours sincerely,
[Executive Headteacher or authorised signatory]

Appendix 2 Repayment agreement

Parent or responsible payer: _____

Pupil and class where relevant: _____

Service and period: _____

Account reference: _____

Balance agreed at [date]: £_____

We agree the following payments towards the outstanding balance.

Payment method: [details].
Review date: [date].
Contact for questions or changes: [name and details].

Instalment	Payment date	Amount
1		£
2		£
3		£
4		£
5		£
6		£

Total repayments: £_____ Final payment date: _____

Future service payments and any specific arrangements: [details]

I agree to make the payments listed above. I will contact the school promptly if I cannot meet a payment or my circumstances change. I understand that future chargeable services will normally need to be paid for in advance.

If I do not engage with the school or fail to keep to this plan without agreeing revised terms, the school may refer the outstanding debt to a third-party debt recovery agency after review and final written notice under its Debt Recovery Policy. A missed payment will not automatically trigger referral without the school first attempting contact and considering the circumstances.

Parent or responsible payer

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

For the school

Name and role: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

A copy of this agreement will be given to the parent or responsible payer. The school will record payments and confirm any agreed changes in writing.