

Debt Recovery Policy

Contents

History of policy changes and review..... 3

Introduction..... 4

Legal framework..... 4

Roles and responsibilities..... 4

Methods of payment..... 5

Acceptable credit period..... 5

Declaring outstanding debt levels..... 6

Debt recovery procedures..... 6

Verbal and written overdue payment reminders..... 6

Failure to respond..... 6

Negotiation of debt payment..... 7

Exceptional circumstances and remissions..... 7

Debt recovery costs..... 8

Write offs..... 8

History of policy changes and review

Policy	Briarwood School Debt Recovery Policy
Author	Finance & Business Development Manager
Approved by	Operations Committee
Review frequency	Annual
Next review date	February 2026

HISTORY OF POLICY CHANGES / REVIEWS

Date	Change	Details
February 2026	New policy	Policy created

Introduction

Briarwood School will take all reasonable measures to vigorously collect debts as part of its management of public funds. A debt will be written off only after all reasonable measures, commensurate with the size and nature of the debt, have been taken to recover it.

Outstanding debts incurred by the school on behalf of a pupil will be treated individually. The circumstances that have led to the outstanding debt will be considered to determine the best course of action and whether it is fair and reasonable to pursue the debt in its entirety, if at all.

Sales ledger debts will be pursued via all practical means and in line with all Service Level Agreements or contractual terms and conditions.

Legal framework

This policy has due regard to all relevant legislation and statutory guidance including, but not limited to, the following:

- Bristol City Council’s Financial Regulations for Schools with Delegated Budgets, 2022
- Bristol City Council’s Scheme for Financing Schools, 2025

This policy operates in conjunction with the following school policies:

- Data Protection Policy
- Finance Policy (and the Lunch Money Banking Procedure)
- Declarations of Interests Policy
- Anti-fraud and Corruption Policy
- Charging and Remissions Policy

Roles and responsibilities

The **governing board** is responsible for:

- Reviewing this policy on an annual basis.
- Regularly reviewing details of Briarwood’s debts and what recovery action is needed.
- Consultation and agreement if legal services are required for debt recovery.
- Adhering to the privacy rights of pupils and their guardians in all cases.
- Deciding to leave a case of debt recovery to the decision of the Executive Headteacher.
- Agreeing the write-off of any debts ahead of school accounts being updated by the LA.

The **Executive Headteacher** is responsible for:

- The overall implementation of this policy and ensuring that all staff, parents and pupils are aware of their responsibilities.
- Ensuring the privacy of the pupil and their family will be protected by all staff.
- Deciding on cases of debt recovery where legal services may be required.

The **Head of Operations** is responsible for:

- Ensuring instances of debt are judged on an individual basis, with consideration of the nature of the debt and the circumstances of the family involved.

The **Finance and Business Development Manager** is responsible for:

- Ensuring the level of outstanding debt owed to the school can be determined at short notice.
- Ensuring that debt recovery procedures are followed.
- Collating all documentation relating to the annual process for debt write-offs, where needed.

The **Site Administrators** are responsible for:

- Following debt recovery procedures regarding lunch and trip money.
- Recording, filing and saving parent carer / pupil-related debt reminders, and ensuring those records are maintained for a period of seven years – this includes dates and times of letters, phone calls, emails, conversations or any other correspondence.

The **Finance and Business Development Assistant** is responsible for:

- Following debt recovery procedures regarding sales ledger invoices.
- Recording, filing and saving sales ledger-related debt reminders, and ensuring those records are maintained for a period of seven years – this includes dates and times of letters, phone calls, emails, conversations or any other correspondence.

Methods of payment

Payments will be expected from parents for school meals in advance of the meals being required. Payments can be made weekly, fortnightly, monthly or when the account nears zero. Payment can be made using our online payment system (Arbor ParentPay), cash or cheque.

Where parents make payments in cash, or by cheque, they will deposit the money with the site administrator at reception and a receipt will be issued.

Where a pupil's meal has been paid for in advance and they are absent on the day of the meal, the amount paid will be credited towards a future meal.

The school will check the eligibility of all applicants for free school meals (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.

Payment of sales invoices, issued through the RM accounts system, will be expected from organisations and businesses via BACS payment and made payable to the Bristol City Council General Account.

Briarwood School training events booked through Eventbrite may be paid for using debit or credit cards. Payment is required in advance.

Acceptable credit period

In the case of a debt, the local authority requires a follow up demand be made to the debtor within 21 days of the due date of the invoice. The terms of all sales invoices will be no less than payment within 14 days and will usually be 30 days. For lunch money, or other parent carer debts, one term (there being six in one academic year) is deemed an acceptable credit period.

Declaring outstanding debt levels

The Executive Headteacher and governing board will review the level of outstanding debts every term, via the financial budgeting and outturn process, to determine whether current debt levels are acceptable and whether current methods and procedures to recover debts are effective.

Initiating debt recovery procedures

Where there is an outstanding payment yet to be received and the acceptable credit period has been surpassed, a phone call, conversation, official letter or email will be created requesting payment of the debt, the payment date required, also outlining the value and reason for the debt and payment options.

Upon initiating contact regarding payment of a debt, this information must be saved or logged and kept for a period of seven years.

Verbal and written overdue payment reminders

Overdue payment reminders are outlined below:

1. **Initial verbal reminder** – informal in-person, telephone or email correspondence notifying the individual of debt with the date and time officially recorded. This should take place when the debt becomes overdue.
2. **First formal written reminder** – an official, dated letter or email addressed to the debtor which will be written up two weeks after the first informal reminder and will acknowledge that it took place. This should take place within 21 days of the initial reminder.
3. **Second formal written reminder** – this will arrive two weeks after the second reminder, citing the details of both previous reminders and stating that concerted efforts have been made to make the person aware that an outstanding debt is overdue. This should take place within 10 days of the first formal reminder.

For sales ledger debts, and if the service is of a continuing nature, all work should cease and or be withdrawn until payment is received.

Failure to respond

If overdue payment reminders are not responded to, another letter will be sent to the debtor advising them that the case has been to the school's legal advisors and governing board.

It is then for these parties to agree on a timeframe for a repayment or, if necessary, a payment plan for separate instalments.

The school expects that the debt should be repaid as soon as possible, particularly after repeated reminders; however, this can be negotiated at the discretion of the governing board.

If there is a case where the debtor is deemed to be refusing to pay without sufficient reason, the school may consider involving the LA's legal services to resolve the issue and recuperate owed funds.

Negotiation of debt payment

It is expected that the debt will be repaid as soon as possible, particularly after repeated reminders; however, this will be negotiated at the discretion of the governing board, taking in to account all relevant circumstances, particularly in relation to debts relating to costs incurred on behalf of an individual pupil.

If there is a case where the debtor is deemed to be refusing to pay without sufficient reason, the school may consider involving LAs and the council's legal services to resolve the issue and recuperate owed funds.

Exceptional circumstances and remissions

The school will ensure that parents of pupils are aware of the help that can be extended to those in financial difficulty and that families who are eligible for free school meals are made aware of this. Parents who may be eligible for remissions are those in receipt of any of the following benefits:

- 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 State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit, provided that they are not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit – if they apply on or after 1 April 2018, their household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits that they receive)

In a case where there is, or it is suspected that there is, an overdue debt from a family who may qualify for remissions, details of the different types of bursary available will be sent to the debtor in question.

In a case where there is, or it is suspected that there is, an overdue debt from a family who may qualify for remissions, details of the different types of bursaries available will be sent to the debtor in question.

The governing board is not guaranteed, but may decide, to waive or reduce the outstanding debt in these circumstances.

Please see Briarwood's Charging and Remissions Policy for more information.

Debt recovery costs

In addition to the remission allowances outlined in the section above, it may be advisable to waive or partially waive debts where it is deemed that it does not make financial sense to continue allocating time and resources to pursuing debt recovery. The decision whether to waive a debt will be made by the Executive Headteacher and governing board.

Debt write-offs

Where debt cannot be recovered or invoices credited, a formal writing-off of debts in the accounts requires minuted agreement from the governing body and consultation with TWS Finance in order for the accounts to be brought up to date. Consideration of debt write-offs should be undertaken annually and before the financial Year End. Write-offs will reduce income in the year that the debt is written off.

Governing Bodies are authorised by the Local Authority to write off individual amounts owed to the school up to £5,000 following consideration of a report from the Executive Headteacher / Head of Operations. The decision must be minuted.

Amounts in excess of £5,000 can only be written off by the Executive Member for Children and Young People's Services, Bristol City Council.