Cedar Tree Federation Payment in Arrears Policy for both:
Pinhoe C of E Primary School and Woodbury C of E Primary School

This policy will be reviewed at the HT discretion if it requires a change

1. Introduction

This policy sets out the Federation's approach to managing payment arrears, including those for school meals. It recognises the need to balance the welfare of pupils with the responsible management of public funds. The Headteacher and Finance Team have a duty to ensure that school budgets are used appropriately and that debt is minimised, while also ensuring that no child is denied a meal due to financial hardship. The Federation is committed to working sensitively and supportively with families who may be experiencing financial difficulties, and to ensuring that all actions taken are fair, transparent, and well-documented.

2. School Dinner Accounts

The Federation operates a pre-paid school meal system. Parents and carers are required to pay in advance for school meals using the My Child At School (MCAS) system. Each time a pupil takes a school meal, the cost is automatically deducted from their individual account.

Where an account falls into arrears—whether due to previous debt or emergency meal ordering—the procedures outlined below will be followed. The school maintains the principle that no child will be left without lunch, regardless of account balance. Parents experiencing difficulty making payments are encouraged to contact the school in confidence. They may be referred to the Family Support Worker or a senior member of staff for guidance and support. All discussions and actions will be recorded and retained as part of the school's financial records.

3. Procedure for Managing Dinner Money Arrears

Step 1: Initial Contact

When a dinner account goes into arrears, the Office Team will contact the parent/carer by telephone to discuss the situation and request immediate payment via MCAS. This communication aims to clarify whether the arrears are an oversight or due to financial difficulty.

Step 2: Follow-Up Reminders

If the debt remains unpaid, further reminders will be issued. Parents/carers will be informed that their child may not be able to continue taking school meals until the balance is cleared, and that a packed lunch must be provided daily.

At this stage, the Finance Team will make a further telephone call to discuss the situation and explore whether a payment plan would be an appropriate supportive measure.

Step 3: Referral to the Head Teacher

If, in the judgement of the Finance Team, payment is unlikely to be made, the matter will be escalated to the Head Teacher for review and decision-making regarding next steps.

Step 4: Final Reminder and Possible Referral to Devon County Council

If the Head Teacher determines that escalation is necessary, a Final Reminder Letter will be issued. This letter will:

- Instruct parents/carers that their child should not order school meals until the

debt is cleared.

- Inform them that they will be contacted to provide a packed lunch if their child arrives without one.
- Advise that unpaid debt may be referred to Devon County Council, which may affect their credit rating.

If full payment is not received within 14 days of the Final Reminder, and the arrears meet the minimum threshold set by Devon County Council, the debt will be formally referred for recovery. Only longstanding debts where parental engagement has been unsuccessful will be escalated.

Step 5: Other Types of Arrears

The same procedures apply to arrears relating to:

- Residential trips
- Nursery fees
- Other chargeable school activities

4. Partnership with Parents and Carers

The Federation aims to work collaboratively with families to prevent and address arrears. Open communication is encouraged, and the school will take reasonable steps to support parents/carers experiencing financial difficulty.

However, the school also has a responsibility to ensure that public funds are used appropriately. School budgets cannot be used to subsidise unpaid debts owed by parents/carers.