Charging and Remissions Policy

Policy Owner:	**The Mercian Trust** Finance & Resources Committee
Approved / Ratified:	**October 2024**
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Introduction

The Mercian Trust (the Trust) is required by law to adopt a policy on charging and remission arrangements for activities for the schools within the Trust.

The Trust wishes to provide for all students the best possible educational opportunities available within the funds allocated by the Education & Skills Funding Agency. The law states very clearly that education during normal school hours is to be free of any compulsory charge to parents/carers, and the Trust is committed to upholding the legal requirements.

However, educationally valuable activities have been and will continue to be dependent on financial contributions in whole or in part from parents/carers. The Trust's concern is to keep financial contributions to a reasonable minimum, and to ensure as far as possible that all children are able to take part, irrespective of their circumstances. The Trust also recognises where contributions are only permitted on a voluntary basis that parents will be advised accordingly.

The law recognises that charges may be made to parents/carers in certain defined circumstances - provided that the Trust and its schools have identified the activities for which charges will be made, and have explained the basis on which charges may be reduced or waived for certain students.

The agreed policy is below.

1. Admissions

There is no charge for admissions. For the selective schools within the Trust, there is no charge to sit the schools' entrance tests.

2. School meals

There is no charge for children who are entitled to free school meals or infant free school meals. Pupils who are not entitled to free school meals will be charged as per the prices displayed within each of the schools in the Trust. These may vary from school to school, depending on the individual schools' catering arrangements.

3. Public examinations

There is no charge for examinations that are part of the curriculum and on the schools' set examinations list, where children have been prepared for the examinations by any of the schools within the Trust.

However, if the pupil fails without good reason to meet an examination requirement, the School concerned may recover the fee incurred from that pupil's parents. There is no charge for examinations that are not on the set list but have been arranged by the school.

Should a re-sit be required for a Public Examination the Trust will make a charge if no further preparation has been provided by the school, or where a student has not achieved the required standard or in the event of failure where the school has paid the original examination fee.

There is a charge of the examination entry fee(s) if the registered pupil has not been prepared for the examination(s) at the school (see Optional extras under section 5)

4. Activities that take place during academy hours (this does not include the break in the middle of the academy day)

There is no charge for activities during academy hours with the exception of music tuition (section 8).

There is no charge for transport during academy hours to academy-organised activities.

The academy may charge for:

- books and materials that the parent wishes the child to keep (the cost will be made
- clear to the parents before charge)
- optional extras (section 5)
- music or vocal tuition (section 8).

5. Activities that take place outside of academy hours (non-residential)

There is no charge for activities that take place outside of academy hours when they are:

- part of the set curriculum, including sports matches against other schools
- part of the syllabus for a public examination that the pupil is being prepared for by the
- academy
- part of the academy's basic curriculum for religious education.

Optional extras

The academy will charge for optional extras. Optional extras are:

- education provided outside of academy time that is not:
  a) part of the National Curriculum
  b) part of a syllabus for a prescribed public examination that the pupil is being prepared for at the academy
  c) part of religious education
- examination entry fee(s) if the registered pupil has not been prepared for the examination(s) at the academy
- transport that does not take the pupil to an academy or to other premises where the local authority or governing body has arranged for the pupil to be provided with education.
- board and lodging for a pupil on a residential visit.

The cost of optional extras

The Principal will decide when it is necessary to charge for optional activities, and the levels of charge will be set annually by the Principal on the recommendation of the Local Governing Body. The charges, when determined, will be published on the academy's website and appended to this policy.

Any charge made in respect of individual pupils will not exceed the actual cost of providing the optional extra activity, divided equally by the number of pupils participating. In no circumstances will there be an element of subsidy required for any pupils wishing to

participate in the activity whose parents are unwilling or unable to pay the full charge (section 12).

When calculating the cost of optional extras an amount may be included in relation to:

- any materials, books, instruments or equipment provided in connection with the optional extra
- non-teaching staff
- teaching staff engaged under contracts for services purely to provide an optional extra, including supply teachers engaged specifically to provide the optional extra
- the cost, or a proportion of the costs, for teaching staff employed to provide tuition in playing a musical instrument, where the tuition is an optional extra.

Participation in any optional extra activity will be on the basis of parental choice and a willingness to pay the charges. The academy will need to have the agreement of parents before organising the provision of an optional extra where charges will be made.

Where a Trip is organised by an external agent or operator, who may require a non-refundable deposit from the academy any student deposit paid will also be non-refundable (to the value of the deposit charged by the organiser), unless the academy is able to obtain a refund. In calculating costs of trips, any late withdrawal may impact the charges to other students. Consequently, In the event of late withdrawal from a Trip, the academy reserves the right to withhold any payments made towards such trip, unless a replacement can be found or the cost impact to other students or the school is nil. The academy also reserves the right to charge the administration fee in such cases.

6. Activities that take place partly during academy hours either on or off site

Where the majority of a non-residential activity takes place during academy hours the charging of the activity will be the same as is outlined in section 4.
Travelling time is included in time spent on activity.

In cases where the majority of a non-residential activity takes place outside of academy hours the charge cannot include the cost of alternative provision for those pupils who do not wish to participate. So no charge can be made for supply teachers to cover for those teachers who are absent from the academy accompanying pupils on a visit.

In this case the charging of the activity will be the same as is outlined in section 5.

7. Residential activities

Our academy will not charge for:

- education provided on any visit that takes place during academy hours
- education provided on any visit that takes place outside academy hours if it is part of the National Curriculum, or part of a syllabus for a prescribed public examination that the pupil is being prepared for at the academy, or part of religious education
- supply teachers to cover for those teachers who are absent from the academy accompanying pupils on a residential visit
- travel costs where the residential activity is classed as being within academy hours
- residential activities that take place during academy hours.

Our academy will charge for:

Board and lodging
When any visit has been organised by the academy where there may be a cost for board and lodging, parents will be informed of this before the visit takes place. We will charge anything up to the full cost of board and lodging on residential visits, whether it is classified as taking place during academy hours or not. The charge will not exceed the actual cost.
Parents who can prove they are in receipt of certain benefits may be exempt from paying this cost (see section 11 for more guidance on remissions).
Transactional fees or administration costs incurred in administering the activity may also be included.

Travel
Travel charges may apply when the residential activity takes place outside of academy hours. The amount charged will be calculated to cover the unit cost per pupil. These charges may not apply to those pupils entitled to remissions, but no other pupils will be charged extra to cover those costs.

Activities
The academy may charge for residential activities that fall outside of academy hours (see section 5).

8. Music tuition within academy hours

The Trust follows government legislation that states that all education provided during academy hours must be free; however, music lessons are an exception to this rule.
Charges will be made if the teaching is not an essential part of either the National Curriculum or a public examination syllabus being followed by the pupil(s), or the first access to the Key Stage 2 Instrumental and Vocal Tuition Programme (Wider Opportunities).
The academy may charge for teaching requested by parents and delivered by specialist tutors given to either an individual pupil or groups of any appropriate size (provided that the size of the group is based on sound pedagogical principles) to play a musical instrument or to sing. The cost of these lessons may depend on the size and duration of the class as well as the type of instrument.

The academy will not charge if the music tuition is part of the National Curriculum or public examination syllabus being followed by the student. This includes instruments, music books and exam fees.

For specialised tuition requested by parents, specialist tutors are procured by the academy on an annual contract. The academy acts as administrators on behalf of the parents. Charges are made equal to amounts paid by the Trust. In the event of force majeure, and events prevent the provision of the tuition, the academy will attempt to obtain refunds. The value of the refunds will then be reimbursed to parents.

The Trust is dedicated to ensuring equal opportunities for all pupils including access to specialised music tuition, therefore charges made for music tuition within academy hours will be remitted for pupils on free academy meals.

There is no charge for vocal or instrumental tuition for children in care. This includes instruments, music books and exam fees.

9. Extended services

The Trust is dedicated to providing a well-rounded and extensive education for our students which includes a wide range of extra-curricular activities (extended services). Extended services enable our academy to provide:

- high-quality learning opportunities either side of the academy day
- ways of intervening early when children are at risk of poor outcomes, e.g. by providing access to study support, parenting support or to more specialist services (such as health, social care or special educational needs services)
- ways of increasing pupil engagement
- ways of improving outcomes and narrowing gaps in outcomes between different groups of pupils.
- Breakfast and homework / extended hours clubs which sometimes include providing meals.

The total charge will not exceed the cost of providing the activity and no parent will be asked to subsidise others

Charging for Performances

- Where the academy puts on a performance or a show that is undertaken out of academy hours, which includes students, a charge may be made for the event.

Charging for Cost of Ingredients, Materials, etc.

- Students have a right to access a full curriculum entitlement in terms of practical activities, regardless of ability to pay. Parents/carers may make a voluntary contribution to these costs. The academy may make a charge for these items if the parents agree that they wish to own the finished product. However, there are occasions when students and parents may pay for materials and ingredients which will enhance or extend the scope of a particular activity.

10. Damage to property and breakages

Where academy property has been willfully damaged by a student or parent the academy may charge those responsible for some or all of the cost of repair or replacement.

Where property belonging to a third party has been damaged by a pupil, and the academy has been charged, the academy may charge some or all of the cost to those responsible. Whether or not these charges will be made will be decided by the Principal and depend on the situation.

11. Remissions and concessions

The academy will give consideration to the remission of charges to parents or carers who receive the following support payments:

- Income Support
- Income based Job-seekers Allowance
- Child Tax Credit (where the person is not receiving Working Tax Credit as well)
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Guaranteed Element of State Pension Credit

- Income related employment and support allowance

Children of families who receive these payments are also entitled to free academy meals.

Parents who are eligible for the remission of charges will be dealt with confidentially.

The Principal and Chair of Local Governors will authorise the remission of charges (please see the Trust's Financial Support policy for the process to be adopted).

The academy may choose to subsidise part or all of the payment of some charges for certain activities and pupils, and this will be determined by the Local Governing Body and Principal.

12. Voluntary contributions

The Trust may ask for voluntary contributions to the academy for general funds and/or to fund activities that will enrich our pupils' education.

In any case where an activity cannot be afforded without voluntary funding, this will be made clear to the parents by the academy. If the activity is cancelled all monies paid will be returned to parents.

There is no obligation for a parent or carer to make any contribution and the academy will in no way pressure parents to make a contribution.

13. Inability or unwillingness to pay

The Trust is committed to ensuring fair access and treatment of all pupils, and this means ensuring that no child is excluded from an activity because the parents or carers of that child are unwilling or unable to pay. If there is insufficient funding for an activity, then it will be cancelled.

The identity of the child or parents of the child who did not want to make the payment, or could not make the payment, will not be disclosed under any circumstances.