

Free School Meals Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who can apply?

In order to qualify for Free School Meals for your children you must be in receipt of one 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 you are not entitled to Working Tax Credit**, and have an annual gross income (as assessed by HM Revenue & Customs) of no more than £16,190
- Working Tax Credit 'run-on' – paid for four weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit

Young people who receive any of the above benefits in their own right (i.e. they get benefits payments directly, instead of through a parent or guardian) are also entitled to receive Free School Meals at sixth form.

You can claim for children attending a state school who are of statutory school age (reception age to 16) and sixth form pupils in schools. If the pupil attends a college you will need to contact the college direct.

The Government does not allow us to recognise any other benefit other than those mentioned.

2. My child is eligible for Free School Meals but I don't want to take up the offer – why am I being encouraged to apply?

For every child that is entitled to Free School Meals the school receives extra funding to enhance provision and improve progress and outcomes for children. This is called the Pupil Premium Grant. Your child can still bring a packed lunch if they prefer but by applying through the Free School Meal Portal you ensure their school receives this grant.

3. What are Universal Infant Free School Meals?

From September 2014 all infant school children were eligible to have a school meal for free. You still need to apply through the Free School Meal Portal to ensure your child's school receives any additional funding they may be entitled to.

4. Can over 16s qualify?

To be eligible for a free meal, students must be enrolled in further education provision funded via the Education Funding Agency at:

- general further education colleges, including specialist colleges sixth form colleges
- commercial and charitable providers
- higher education institutions (HEIs) with 16 to 19 funding from the EFA
- independent specialist providers (ISPs)
- local authorities (LAs) and FE institutions directly funded for 16 to 19s
- Skills Funding Agency (SFA) only traineeship 16 to 18 providers
- European Social Fund (ESF) only institutions
- 16 to 19 academies and free schools

5. What is the Free School Meal Portal?

As a parent and/or carer you can apply for Free School Meals online along with your Admissions and Transport applications. The Free School Meals Portal also includes an online eligibility checking service which provides instant feedback – so we can easily confirm if you are entitled.

6. Do you need to have a computer to do this?

No – applications can also be made using your Smartphone or tablet. It's also possible to use computers at Gloucestershire libraries

7. What do you need in order to apply?

You will need to have an email address and your National Insurance or National Asylum Support Service (NASS) number to hand

8. Can I use my login and password which I had when I applied for a school place?

Yes, it will be the same login and password as when you applied through the portal for School Admissions or if you have recently made an application through the Year 2 Funding portal.

9. Is this the only method of applying?

No, the paper forms are still available but it will be far more efficient and quicker to apply using the portal. The portal will advise you of your entitlement shortly after you have fully submitted your application, unlike the current five day processing time with paper forms.

10. Do all parents need to apply?

If your child(ren) is currently receiving Free School Meals, it is not necessary to apply again. This new system for applying is for new claimants.

11. Do parents from all Gloucestershire schools apply through the Gloucestershire County Council portal?

A few of the Gloucestershire schools have opted to administer their Free School Meal applications rather than apply through Gloucestershire County Council. If your child attends one of the schools below, please contact the school directly for further information on submitting an application:

- Bourton-on-the-Water Primary School
- Cirencester Deer Park School

12. Will my claim be back-dated?

No, entitlement to free meals will start from the date we receive your application.

13. What can I expect my child to receive as a meal?

A school meal can be either hot or cold. It depends on what facilities the school has. Your child will receive a main course and a dessert. Drinking water should be provided by all schools, and you will need to pay for any alternative drinks.

14. How do I apply for free milk?

If your child's primary school provides milk at break-time, this will be free for the time your child is entitled to Free School Meals. Please contact your child's school to see if free milk is available and how to apply for it. This is not available in secondary schools.

15. How will the school know my child does not have to pay for school meals?

The schools concerned will be notified directly by the Free School Meals Team that your child can have a school meal free of charge.

Each school makes its own arrangements for notifying the dinner service staff which children are eligible to receive a free school meal. You can use your letter of entitlement as confirmation.

16. What if my benefits cease?

You will need to contact the Free School Meals Team immediately.

Do not continue to receive Free School Meals unless your child is in Reception, Year 1 or Year 2 and therefore qualifies for Universal Infant Free School Meals.

If your child is in Year 3 or above and they have Free School Meals after you no longer receive the qualifying benefits you will be asked to pay for the meals your child has received since the time you were no longer entitled to claim.

17. What if my circumstances change?

You must inform us if your circumstances change although your eligibility will be reviewed periodically.

It is essential that you contact the Free School Meals Team with any changes of address or other circumstance. If your financial circumstances change you will be notified if your child is no longer entitled.

If your child transfers school and was receiving Free School Meals at their previous school you do not need to reapply as entitlement will transfer automatically to their new school if it is still a state school in Gloucestershire.

18. If I have a query, who can I contact?

General advice and support can be given by the Free School Meals Team by emailing edsupport@gloucestershire.gov.uk