

Transition protection

A roll-out for free school meal checks was initiated on 1st April 2018 and is due to finish on 31st March 2023 for the implementation of Universal Credit.

If you become eligible **at any time** the child will be protected, regardless of your change in financial circumstances, until the end of the phase of education they are in as of 31st March 2023.

This protection remains if

- Another carer becomes responsible at a later date
- A child is eligible and is then taken into care or fostered at a later date

Applications

Your financial circumstances at the time of the check determines your child's eligibility.

- The eligibility status is only for those children for whom you apply for. Don't assume that if one child is eligible then siblings are also eligible. Include all relevant children on the application forms to all relevant schools.
- Please note eligibility does **not** cover siblings. Just because a child is eligible it doesn't mean a sibling is automatically eligible at a future date so you need to send in a separate application for any children for whom you wish to apply.

Universal credit and legacy benefits

Legacy benefits:

- If you are receiving child tax credit and your declared income is below £16,190 then you should be eligible.
- If, **in addition to the above**, you are also receiving working tax credits then you are **NOT** eligible regardless of your income because WTC covers free school meal payments.

Universal Credit

If you are in the process of applying for Universal Credit the checking system may not automatically say you are eligible because it is based on the payments you receive for up to the most recent three months starting from the current month. It may take a few weeks for eligibility to be confirmed as it is based on a payment threshold.

- If your take home pay for the most recent month is more than £616.67 then you are not eligible
- If your combined take home pay for the most recent two months is more than £1,233.34 then you are not eligible
- If your combined taken home pay for the most recent three months is at least £1,850 then you are not eligible.

It is recommended that you at least wait until your first payment is confirmed before you apply then you can send evidence to the school if required.

Further information on eligibility criteria can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>

Requests

A request for free school meals must be made in order for a child to become eligible. The cost of school meals cannot be claimed for any period prior to a claim for free school meals being made.

Your entitlement commences on the date when an application is made to the school. Claims to be reimbursed for any school meals previously paid for during your period of benefit entitlement will not normally be met.

Children in early years or reception classes who are below compulsory school age must be attending both before and after the lunch period, in order to be eligible to receive free school meals.

Children in the care of the Local Authority, e.g. foster children, or of a voluntary organisation, cannot be considered for free school meals.

How to make a claim

Please complete an application form (making sure the NI number is clear and readable) and give it to your school office. They will send the request to the council.

Please make sure the information you provide on the form is the same as you provide HMRC and DWP.

Eligibility and transitional protection

The following table shows at the end of which phase of education your child's protection will end if you become entitled between now and 31st March 2023 depending on which year the child is in when they do become eligible. The normal process will resume for children who enter reception in September 2023.

	Sep-19	Sep-20	Sep-21	Sep-22	Sep-23	Sep-24	Sep-25	Sep-26	Sep-27	Sep-28
Your child is protected until the end of primary school			Rec	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6	
	Rec	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6			
	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6				
	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6					
	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6						
Your child is protected until the end of secondary school	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6	Yr 7	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10	Yr 11		
	Yr 5	Yr 6	Yr 7	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10	Yr 11			
	Yr 6	Yr 7	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10	Yr 11				
	Yr 7	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10	Yr 11					
	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10	Yr 11						
No recheck required	Yr 9	Yr 10	Yr 11	Yr 12	Yr 13	Yr 14				
	Yr 10	Yr 11	Yr 12	Yr 13	Yr 14					
	Yr 11	Yr 12	Yr 13	Yr 14						
	Yr 12	Yr 13	Yr 14							
	Yr 13	Yr 14								
Yr 14										

Eligibility status

The system will return one of four responses

- **“Found”** – You are eligible.

Not Found:

- **“Final”** – You are not currently eligible.
- **“No trace – check data”** – This may either mean (a) you have provided the council with incorrect details so the school will ask you to re-confirm or (b) if you have recently applied for benefits your details may not yet be on the system.
- **“Pending – Keep checking”** - This likely means that your eligibility has not yet been determined if you are not receiving any benefits but you have applied for Universal Credit. Please be aware that it can take a few weeks for the result to change. These particular results are checked daily.

If you are not eligible

If this is the case and you think you are eligible please check your financial circumstances meet the criteria and / or contact DWP / HMRC. It will be up to you to send in another application for a re-check.

If you are told by the school you are not eligible please do **not** phone council customer services or contact Children services reception to query this. Staff will inform you to direct enquiries through your school.

Discontinuing your eligibility and transition protection

We maintain a list of all eligible parents and the date they become eligible and the schools also record FSM start dates. If your circumstances change such that you feel you would like to voluntarily discontinue your FSM eligibility you are more than welcome to do this as it does **not** affect your protection. If your finances deteriorate that you need to re-establish eligibility then please notify the school.

Data protection and council record keeping

Information contained on the application form is personal data and will be held in a computer securely. The information held is subject to the Data Protection Act 1998 and GDPR.

Records of eligible children will be retained with the confirmation date until such time they are no longer required.