Updated July 2025

APPLICATION FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

Who is eligible?

Free school meals are available to pupils whose parents are in receipt of one or more of the following benefits:

- o Universal Credit (provided you have an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400), as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods
- o Income Support
- o income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- o income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- o support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- o the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- o Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- o Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

Older individuals who have their own NI number who get paid these benefits directly, instead of through a parent or guardian, are also eligible if they meet the criteria.

Important notes concerning transition protection:

Due to change in government policy, if your child is eligible, they'll remain so until the end of the 2025/26 academic year. This is irrespective of any change in carer or financial circumstances (the exception being ineligible children who go into LA care).

The DfE will issue further guidance at a later date.

There is no need to request further checks as eligibility is recorded on the term census.

You can voluntarily withdraw your children from FSM if you wish but this does not invalidate the protection and you can ask the school to re-instate it.

Additional notes:

- In all cases, please note that a request for free school meals must be made 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.

- 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 and must be checked for their FSM eligibility. EYPP eligibility and FSM are different and needs to be checked separately.
- To receive free school meals, a claim must be made by the pupil, their parent or another responsible adult, before the pupil becomes entitled.

- children attend schools outside of Wokingham Borough should contact their child's school, or the local authority which maintains the school, with regards to free school meals, as their local arrangements for processing claims may be different.

How to Apply:

1. Complete an application form in full and give this to the office at your child's school. Make sure you request a check for each child to the appropriate schools.

2. An on-line check will be made using the information provided on the form. The details provided will be exchanged via secure websites. The system will provide a confirmation of your eligibility. **Please make sure the information you provide matches what you provide HMRC otherwise the result will be 'no trace – check data' and will hold up confirmation.**

3. Your child's school will inform you of the result and the effective date of your eligibility.

What if I disagree with the decision?

If you feel that the result returned by the ECS is inaccurate, please provide paper-based evidence of benefit statements to the school. For families who might be eligible for free school meals under Universal Credit, applicants should provide a copy of their Universal Credit award statement (from their most recent assessment period(s) – going back a maximum of three assessment periods). **The Universal credit threshold for 3 months is £1,850**.

A second option is that a manual check can be requested from the DfE. Please be sure you feel you are eligible before querying the result.

Customer services and the Early Years team have been told to ask parents to contact the council via the school. It is important that you do this as it keeps the school informed of any further enquiries you may have.

Also, please do not send queries to the Early Years team as they cannot assist if it concerns children who are in compulsory education.

For families that are eligible for free school meals under Child Tax Credit or a legacy benefit, applicants should provide:

- a letter from Jobcentre Plus confirming eligibility or Income Support payment book.
- a Tax Credit Award Notice (TC602) from HM Revenue & Customs.

For families who are eligible for free school meals under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 or the guarantee element of the Pension Credit, applicants should provide:

- a letter from the Asylum Seekers Team or the National Asylum Support Service (Home Office) (NASS) stating that they are receiving support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999;

- a 'Pension Credit M1000 Award Notice' clearly showing details of any Guarantee Pension Credit in payment

Providing free school meals to families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)

Free school meal eligibility is extended to children in all households with no recourse to public funds (NRPF), subject to maximum income thresholds. The parent should inform the school of any change in their financial situation.

Eligible groups:

These groups include, but may not be limited to, children of:

- Zambrano carers
- families who have no recourse to public funds with a right to remain in the UK on grounds of private and family life under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights
- families receiving support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 who are also subject to a no recourse to public funds restriction
- a subset of failed asylum seekers supported under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Chen carers
- families holding a BN(O) Passport
- spousal visa holders
- work visa holders
- student visa holders
- those with no immigration status

Income thresholds

Under the permanent extension of free school meal eligibility to all NRPF groups, the annual household income thresholds for those families able to work are:

- £22,700 for families with 1 child
- £26,300 for families with 2 or more children