

Updated July 2025

APPLICATION FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR SCHOOLS

Universal credit roll-out and transition protection

Children of a carer who is eligible as of 31st March 2018 or will become eligible at any time between 1st April 2018 until the end of the 2025/26 academic year will retain protection, regardless of the carers' change in circumstances. For those in secondary phase, it is until the end of year 13.

If the child then comes under the responsibility of another carer at a later date, the child retains protection so a recheck is not required.

NOTE: Eligibility does not cover the family so a younger sibling of an already protected child still needs to be checked so please ensure all children are included.

Looked after children

- Children who are not entitled to FSM and become looked after are **not** eligible. It is still dependent upon the carer's circumstances.
- Children who are eligible for FSM and then become looked after **remain** eligible

CTF files

Before asking a parent to send in an application, please wait for the CTF file for the pupil(s) to check for a start date then it won't be necessary to send in a request. 'Get Information About Pupils' can also be checked for eligibility. This helps with the workload especially in September and October.

Process

1. Provide the guidance and application form to parents
2. Parents complete the application form and return to the school.
3. Make sure the parent has provided you their DOB as that is required as well as their surname and reference number (and the information matches what they have provided HMRC), otherwise the result will return "no trace".

4. If you have any doubt about the NI number please be aware of the following rules:

- First letter: must not be D, F, I, Q, U, V
- Second letter: must not be D, F, I, O, Q, U, V
- Final letter: must be A, B, C or D

5. Fill out the FSM request template and upload it on to S2S. The pupils' names are not required for checking purposes but we still need them to check against the census to see if the start date has been added (and adding the UPN is helpful if possible). **This is important for the October census because it is used to calculate pupil premium funding for schools and LAs.**

6. Parent details are checked on the ECS system and will return one of four results

TRUE - Eligible



Results: Found

Qualifier: FINAL

The details you entered were **successfully** confirmed and the parent is entitled to free meals.

[Perform another Online Query...](#)

National Insurance Number

NASS Reference

Date of Birth

Surname

“FINAL” – The system cannot confirm whether the parent is eligible. There isn't any obligation to request further information but carers need to be sure they meet the criteria.



Results: Not Found

Qualifier: FINAL

The details you entered were **not** confirmed by the system. The details are required to establish eligibility.

[Perform another Online Query...](#)

[Request a manual query...](#)

National Insurance Number

NASS Reference

Date of Birth

Surname

“NO TRACE” – the parent cannot be found on the system and details need to be re-confirmed.



Results: Not Found

Qualifier: No Trace - Check data

The details you entered were **not** confirmed by the system. The details are required to establish eligibility.

[Perform another Online Query...](#)

[Request a manual query...](#)

National Insurance Number

NASS Reference

Date of Birth

Surname

“Pending – Keep checking” – The details will be checked once a week and you will be notified when the result changes, which can take up to 6 weeks. There is no need to upload another request. You can request benefit statements from carers to get an idea if they are eligible.



Results: *Not Found*

Qualifier: Pending - Keep checking

The details you entered were **not** matched by the system. The details required to establish eligibility.

[Perform another Online Query...](#)

[Request a manual query...](#)

National Insurance Number [REDACTED]
NASS Reference [REDACTED]
Date of Birth [REDACTED]
Surname [REDACTED]