

Free School Meals Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who can apply?

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 Pension Credit
- 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**)
- Working Tax Credit **run-on** - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit - **your household income must be less than £7,400 a year / £616 per month (after tax and not including any benefits you get)**

In addition, the following pupils will be protected against losing their free school meals as follows:

- Since 1 April 2018, all existing free school meals claimants have continued to receive free school meals whilst Universal Credit is rolled out. This applies even if their earnings rise above the threshold during that time.
- In addition, any pupil gaining eligibility for free school meals after 1 April 2018 will be protected against losing free school meals until March 2025.
- After March 2025, any existing claimants that no longer meet the eligibility criteria at that point (because they are earning above the threshold or are no longer a recipient of Universal Credit) will continue to receive free school meals until the end of their current phase of education (i.e. primary or secondary)

Young people who receive any of the above benefits (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 above.

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 protected Free School Meals means the school receives extra funding to enhance provision and improve progress and outcomes for children.

This is called the Pupil Premium Grant, the school can use this in any way they choose but many use it to provide free milk, reduced cost trips or help with uniforms etc.

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, this is regardless of the household income

Please still apply via the portal as your entitlement can be checked and if you are entitled to protected free school meals your school will gain additional funding.

We also regularly review universal applications so see if families have become entitled to protected free school meals.

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.

The portal keeps your personal details safe between you and the portal

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 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?

The free school meals team can provide a paper copy if you cannot use the Portal.

Most applications use the portal as this can advise you of your entitlement shortly after you have fully submitted your application.

You can change the language on the site if you prefer

Paper forms will typically take 5 days to process once they reach the team.

With the Portal applications the schools are immediately informed via the live link

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 system for applying is for new claimants only.

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 themselves rather than apply through Gloucestershire County Council.

If your child attends one of the schools below, please contact the school directly to apply for free school meals: -

- Bourton on the Water primary school
- Five Acres High School
- Gloucester Academy School
- Holmleigh Park High School
- Henley Bank High School
- The Ridge School

12. Will my claim be backdated?

No. In accordance with the Department for Education's policy entitlement to free meals will start from the date entitlement is confirmed. Therefore, it is important to apply as soon as you can

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 have a live link to the free school meals entitlement for their own school, as this is a live link it is updated immediately.

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. Please contact the school if you would like to know how the meal will be provided.

16. What if my benefits cease?

You will need to contact the Free School Meals Team immediately. They can check if your child is on the protected period for Free school meals, in which case your child can continue to receive free school meals until the end of the protected period.

The staff at freeschoolmeals@gloucestershire.gov.uk will be able to give you this date.

17. What if I change school?

If your child transfers school and was receiving Free School Meals at their previous Gloucestershire County Council school, you do not need to reapply as entitlement will transfer automatically once the allocation process is completed by the new school.

If your child is moving into Gloucestershire from out of county or country, you will need to apply on the Portal to get free school meals again.

If you think your circumstances have changed but your child was on protected free school meals at a previous out of county school you can write to your previous local authority and get confirmation of this protection and the start and end dates.

If you email this confirmation from the Local authority in to the free school meals team, they will be able to honour this protection.

18. What does "Transitional Protection" mean?

If your child is claiming free school meals based on benefits as of the 01/04/2018 their entitlement will be protected until the 31/03/2025 and after that date to the end of your child's educational phase i.e. primary, secondary.

Transitional protection is exclusive to the child receiving meals as of the 01/04/2018.

Transitional protection will also be awarded to anyone who meets the free school meals criteria and applies between the 01/04/2018 and the 31/03/2025.

19. My eldest child's free school meals are protected until 2025 will this protection cover future applications for siblings?

Protection is exclusive to the child that is protected and will not automatically cover the whole family. For a sibling to be protected the family will have to meet the free school meals criteria at the time of the application.

If you do not meet the free school meals criteria the protected child will remain entitled until the 31/03/2025 but any subsequent applications for siblings will not be approved or protected.

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

General advice and support can be given by the Free School Meals Team by emailing

freeschoolmeals@gloucestershire.gov.uk