

Free School Meals in Bradford

City of Bradford MDC

www.bradford.gov.uk



A guide for schools

Outline

Bradford has a proud history of Free School Meals – we were the first local authority to introduce Free School Meals back in 1906.

For children and young people from lower income families, the free school meal makes a significant contribution to their overall health, and it is vital that children and young people who are entitled to a free meal take up this right.

It's also important to maximise take up as these children will attract the pupil premium and other associated funding. Additionally parents may get further benefits by registering for Free School Meals and this can include assistance with uniform costs, travel to school costs and help with some school trips.

From September 2014 **all** children in reception, year 1 and year 2 will get a Free School Meal. However parents still need to apply for eligibility based Free School Meals for the reasons outlined above. Please see the section on Take Up for further details.

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1. Introduction

Bradford Council's Transport and Education Team deals with Free School Meals (FSM) claims for children who attend schools in the Bradford district. Local authority maintained schools pay for the service directly through the dedicated schools grant. Academies and some other schools with different funding arrangements pay the same amount but are invoiced directly for the service. Some Academies have decided not to use the Council's Service and this guidance therefore does not apply to them.

For the purposes of this guidance free school meals means **eligibility** based free school meals not the "universal" free school meals available to children in reception, year 1 and year 2 from September 2014.

This guidance is for staff in schools who deal with FSM administration. It will hopefully give schools a greater understanding of how entitlement to FSMs is worked out, how it is reported and how important the accurate recording of FSM eligibility within school is.

2. What are Free School Meals?

Local Authorities and governing bodies have had a duty to provide paid school lunches if an application or request is made. The term "school lunch" means food made available for pupils in the period between the morning and afternoon sessions on a school day, whether involving a set meal or the selection of different items by the pupil.

If a child chooses to take a school lunch, the Local Authority or governing body has a statutory duty to provide it free of charge if their parent or partner receives any one of a list of prescribed qualifying benefits. These qualifying criteria for Free School Meals are set nationally by Government.

Although some schools also offer a breakfast and break service, food provided at other times of the day does not constitute a school lunch and so cannot be included as part of a Free School Meal.

3. Which children can get Free School Meals?

In general terms, any child enrolled at a taxpayer funded school or nursery and attending for one or more **full days** a week can get free meals as long as their parents or main carers, as defined below, meet the qualifying criteria. The educational establishment providing the meal need not necessarily be the one that the child is enrolled at.

There is no upper or lower age limit for receiving FSMs as long as the above criteria are met. Both Nursery children and Sixth Formers can get FSMs providing certain specific rules are met.

The funding agreements of Academies and Free Schools also stipulate that free school meals must be provided to eligible pupils.

Qualifying Benefits are:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers 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 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 claimant stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit *

*As Universal Credit is rolled out – further eligibility rules will exist.

** Parents will need to apply directly to school or call Education Services on (01274) 439393.

Nursery Children - pre school

Providing their parents get one of the qualifying benefits, children who attend a taxpayer funded nursery are entitled to free meals on those days where they are booked in for a **full day session** - that is they receive education both mornings and afternoons. They are not entitled to FSMs on those days where they are registered to do just a half-day session - i.e. mornings or afternoons - but then opt to stay for the one hour lunch session as well.

Sixth Formers (years 12, 13, 14)

Sixth formers can receive free school meals - (so long as the sixth form is attached to a maintained school). There is no upper age limit, as long as the pupil concerned began their course of study before their 18th birthday.

From September 2014 16-18 year old college students will also be entitled to free school meals. Colleges are responsible for dealing with these type of applications.

4. Who can apply for Free School Meals?

To receive a Free School Meal an application **must** be made and this will usually be by the parent of the child/children. The definition of "parent" in this case is not restricted to the child's natural parents but also includes any person who is the main carer for the child and who gets one of the qualifying benefits that give FSM entitlement.

This wider definition includes grandparents, other family relations, elder brothers or sisters, Family Network Carers and Foster Carers. As long as the individual concerned can prove he or she has normal parental responsibility for the child, the application will be accepted.

Claims Directly from Children

There are a couple of instances where older pupils can claim for FSMs in their own right. The first case occurs where a child becomes estranged from their parents and moves out to a separate address. In this situation they may be awarded Income Support or Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance in their own right.

The second case is where a child with severe disabilities remains at home but is able to receive Income Support when they reach 16 years of age. In both cases, claims for FSMs can still be paid but the individuals or those looking after them need to make sure that a claim has been made in their own name.

5. The Claim Process

Bradford Council has a combined application form where people can make a claim for Housing/Council Tax Benefit and Free School Meals at the same time. Most people will make a combined claim if they are a householder and this combined application form will, in most cases, mean that people get all the council administered benefits that they are entitled to.

There is a Free School Meal only claim form that can be used where parents are only making an FSM claim – claims can be submitted on-line at:

www.bradford.gov.uk/schoolmeals You should encourage parents to use the online application as this is the quickest method of application and means that we can deal with it more speedily. Parents using the online form will get an immediate response to their application and be told whether they qualify or not. Please advertise this link on your school website to encourage take up of free school meals.

Applications can also be made over the telephone. In order to do this, parents must call the Council's Contact Centre on (01274) 432772.

Applications for Asylum Seekers must be made by parents directly to the school or by telephoning the Education Service on (01274) 439393.

What happens when applications have been submitted to the Council?

The Free School Meal team will deal with the application and let the parent know the outcome. If the parent has used the online form and been found not to qualify, no further confirmation will be sent. Generally all parents who make a successful application will receive a confirmation letter from us. The exception to this is if a parent was already on free school meals and they submit another application. As they are already on our system another confirmation letter will not be issued.

In most cases we don't need evidence from the parent of their qualifying benefit as we can use a nationwide checking hub called the Eligibility Checking Service (ECS) – this gives us an immediate result as to whether the claimant qualifies or not .

Checking entitlement

Bradford does not operate a renewal system for Free School Meals – children will be continuously entitled unless their parents cease to qualify under the eligibility criteria. We will make regular checks to ensure that the child is still eligible and this will be done at least once a term. There can be many reasons why a FSM claim stops and we would urge schools and parents to contact us if they believe that a child is still eligible. When we stop FSM entitlement we will write to the parents and make it very clear that they need to start paying for meals or contact us if they think they should still qualify.

We also monitor our housing benefit caseload to identify those cases who become eligible for Free School Meals. Where we identify new claimants we will contact them to ask them if they wish to apply. Again, parents do need to make an application - we cannot just register them for Free School Meals.

One of the reasons why a FSM claim is not set up is because we do not know which school the child attends. We can check information held in Children's Services – which is downloaded regularly from schools SIM's records. It is therefore important that you provide regular updates to the Information Management Team at Future House.

6. Information sent to schools

From September 2014 all free school meals data is held in your school's secure area on Bradford Schools Online. This data can be accessed by level 1 and level 2 users. Further details on how you can access this data is held on Bradford Schools Online on our free school meals page.

School changes – transfers and leavers

We work with Bradford's Admissions Service during the summer to amend the school details for the primary to secondary school transfers. As you can appreciate, it is a major task for us to data match and then update our systems. For this reason we ask that you check the August/September data especially thoroughly for any mistakes or omissions.

Secondary Schools - please also tell us about children who have left your school after year 11, 12 or 13 as we are not usually notified of this by parents.

School entries – Reception and nursery children

As an application has to be made for FSM, parents of new children starting school should make an application – *even if they have other children at school currently getting FSM*. They can make an application as soon as their school place is allocated. We will process the application as soon as it is received so if the claim is successful we will send the details to you from April onwards. This should assist you in establishing how many of your new reception children have had a successful application.

Primary Schools – please make your new parents aware of this via your prospectus, school website and induction events. It is vital that take up of eligibility based Free School Meals is encouraged even though children in reception will be getting a free meal.

- Please do not ask all parents to fill in an application form. Only parents who are on qualifying benefits should be asked to apply.
- You should also check your own records thoroughly to ensure that they are not already on free school meals.
- Use the online form as we can process these applications much more efficiently.

7. Updating school records

It is **vital** that the SIMs system (or whichever pupil data system your school uses) is updated correctly to reflect the correct FSM status. This is because the data will be collected as part of the school census and used to calculate funding etc for your school.

8. Backdated FSM Awards and Dinner Money Refunds

FSM claims cannot be backdated – they can only be awarded from the date of the claim. In case of any queries you should contact the Free School Meals team on 01274 434477

9. Take up

We want to make sure that every child is taking up their entitlement to Free School Meals – this helps the child and family and is also important in terms of school funding and the pupil premium.

Children who are registered for Free School Meals can also get free milk, help with school clothing costs and assistance with school travel and residential trips. It's important that families are aware of these additional benefits especially in situations where the child cannot or will not actually eat the meal at school. Schools with children who are gastric fed may need to do additional communications with parents who may qualify.

Your school website can be one of the first places parents look for information about help with school meals and other school costs. Please use links to Bradford's website which will take parents straight to the information they need.

As mentioned previously – parents of children in reception, year 1 and year 2 who get a free meal from September 2014 still need to apply if their parents are on qualifying benefits. This is so the pupil premium can be allocated. Please do not ask all parents to apply – only those on qualifying benefits as listed in section 3.

10 Contact Details

Free School Meal team

Telephone: 01274 434477 – this number is for the dedicated Free School Meal team only – we are not resourced to answer calls from parents so please do not give this number to parents.

email: educationbenefits@bradford.gov.uk

Council contact number for parents

Telephone: 01274 432772

All our communications and news concerning Free School Meals will be posted on Bradford Schools Online.