Free School Meals Explained

How do you know if I am eligible?
We check for eligibility securely via the Government's benefits database. To do this we must have your surname, date of birth and your National Insurance number (or National Asylum Seeker reference number if applicable). This check only indicates whether you are eligible for Free School Meals – no other information is revealed.

What evidence of benefits should I send with my application?
You do not need to send us evidence of benefits at the time you apply. If the check indicates that you are not eligible, we will invite you to send us proof of benefits. We will let you know what we need to see.

How often will I need to apply for Free School Meals?
Once you have applied for Free School Meals there is no need to reapply for that particular child (whether you initially pass or fail our checks) even in the following circumstances:

- When your child moves into the next year group
- When your child moves from Primary to Secondary school
- When your child moves schools within Cambridgeshire

However, you are required to make a new application for any younger siblings as they start school.

How long will Free School Meals last?
Children who were entitled to Free School Meals on 1 April 2018 or who become entitled after this date will remain entitled to Free School Meals until the end of the phase of education (primary or secondary school) that they are in on 31 March 2022 *even if your circumstances change*. Therefore, if you stop receiving any of the qualifying benefits or your household income increases your entitlement to Free School Meals will remain unaffected.

If I am in receipt of Working Tax Credit (WTC) can I claim Free School Meals?
Families who are receiving Working Tax Credit are not entitled to Free School Meals, regardless of their income. Your Tax Credit Award Notice will state whether you are receiving WTC. You need to be receiving Child Tax Credit only with a household income less than £16,190 to be entitled to Free School Meals on the basis of Tax Credits.

However, please note that if you are receiving WTC run-on (paid for 4 weeks only after you end employment or start to work less than 16 hours per week) and your household income is less than £16,190 your children should be entitled to Free School Meals.

Can I claim for more than one child on one application form?
Yes, you can apply for all your children on one application and we encourage you to do so as we can only award Free School Meals to children who have been named on an application – we cannot automatically add siblings.

How will I know if my application has been successful or unsuccessful?
Whatever the outcome of your application, we will write to you to let you know. If your application is successful we will also contact your child's school directly to confirm your children's entitlement and the date that this commences. Those who apply online will also receive an email confirmation acknowledging receipt of application.

How are Free School Meals paid for?
No money exchanges hands between the Council and the applicant. This is all done on your behalf behind the scenes.

I am worried my child will be identified as being on Free School Meals – can you tell me the process?
Schools are informed which pupils are entitled to Free School Meals via a secure system and information is kept confidential. Many schools within Cambridgeshire now operate cashless payment systems making it impossible for Free School Meal children to be identified amongst their peers (please contact your local school for confirmation on how they operate the scheme).

If all Key Stage 1 children will be eligible for Universal Infant Free School Meals (UiFSMs) do I still need to apply?
Yes – we highly recommend that you submit an application as if you are entitled to Free School Meals due to low income, your child's school receives additional funding (called 'Pupil Premium') which will go towards supporting their development and can help with things like the cost of school trips (at the schools discretion).

Can I still choose to provide a packed lunch? What if I do not want my child to have a Free School Meal every day?
Parents are welcome to provide packed lunches or additional food items for their child and can opt to utilise the Free School Meal provision on days which they require.

What if my child has special dietary needs or is a fussy eater?
Schools offer a wide range of menu choices and are confident there will be something that your child will eat and enjoy. Further information on school menus is available on each schools website or from the school office.

Secondary School Clothing Allowance
This scheme ended on 31 March 2014. Please contact your school directly to find out if they are part of a local scheme.