

FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Who can claim free school meals?

For a child to be eligible for free school meals, their parents, carers or on occasions the child themselves, need to receive at least one of the following support payments:

- Income Support
- Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) - income-based
- Employment Support Allowance - income-based
- Child Tax Credit - but only when they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and where annual household income (as assessed by the Inland Revenue) does not exceed £16,190 for the tax year 2011-12
- Pension Credit - guarantee element
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

Pupils who are over sixteen may receive Income Support and proof of this must be provided when claiming free school meals.

Who cannot claim free school meals?

Foster Carers

Pupils who are in foster care are not entitled to free school meals because foster parents are paid an allowance that covers the child's food costs.

Families with part-time pupils

Part-time pupils are not entitled to free school meals even if the family receives one of the support payments listed above. Children must receive education before and after lunch to be eligible.

What is acceptable proof of entitlement?

Without proof of one of the support payments free school meals cannot be authorised.

You are responsible for ensuring that only children who are entitled are given free school meals. The type of proof that is acceptable is listed below.

Income Support

- letter from Job Centre Plus proving Income Support and containing the parent's name, address and National Insurance number. The letter must be no more than three months old.
- the free school meals form. Job Centre Plus can sign and stamp the form as validation.

Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) - income-based

- JSA letter, which details their benefit payments. The whole letter needs to be shown, as proof that the JSA is income-based is detailed near the end of the document, under the section 'How your Jobseeker's Allowance was worked out'. The letter must be no more than three months old.
- the free school meals form. The local Job Centre Plus can stamp the form as validation.

Please note, the Jobseeker's Attendance Card cannot be used as proof of entitlement because it does not specify that the JSA is income-based. Contribution-based JSA is not a qualifying benefit for free school meals.

Employment Support Allowance - income related (ESA-IR)

- letter from Job Centre Plus proving (ESA-IR) and containing the parent's name, address and National Insurance number. The letter must be no more than three months old.
- the free school meals form. Job Centre Plus can sign and stamp the form as validation.

Child Tax Credit

A tax Credit award notice (TC602) from the Inland Revenue. The award notice must:

- be shown in full
- be the award notice for the current tax year,
- state that the family receives Child Tax Credit and does not currently receive any Working Tax Credit
- show that the annual income for the household is not more than £16,190 for the 2011-12 tax year.

If a parent or carer has mislaid their Tax Credit award notice they can phone the Inland Revenue Helpline on 0845 300 3900 to request new proof, or they can contact their local Inland Revenue office.

Families who receive Working Tax Credit cannot claim free school meals, regardless of their household income. If they stop receiving Working Tax Credit and have a household income below £16,190 they can then claim for free school meals. They will need to get their award notice updated by the Inland Revenue. The back page of the award notice will then show that the Working Tax Credit has been overpaid, and that the claimant either owes money, or that no further Working Tax Credit is due.

An NHS Exemption Certificate is not acceptable as proof of eligibility. Any provisional award notices cannot be accepted as they do not include finalised tax credit figures or income levels

Forms stamped by the Inland Revenue cannot be accepted because they do not show the family's income level, or the type of Tax Credit they are receiving.

Pension Credit - guarantee element

- Pension Credit award notice (M1000) - the parent or carer must receive the guarantee credit element to be able to claim free school meals. This is shown in the section of the award notice titled “How Pension Credit has been worked out for ...”.
- A letter dated within the last three months from The Pension Service.

Pension Credit payment books cannot be accepted as proof of eligibility because they do not specify the type of Pension Credit the person is receiving. Forms stamped by the Pension Service cannot be accepted as proof of eligibility because they do not specify that the person receives the guarantee credit element of Pension Credit.

Asylum seeker support

- written evidence, from the social worker or the NASS (National Asylum Support Service), confirming that the family is receiving support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

Asylum seekers do not normally have a National Insurance number until their asylum application has been processed. Once they have a National Insurance number, their application will need to be re-assessed.