

I am writing to tell you about recent changes to free school meals eligibility under Universal Credit. As you may be aware, Universal Credit will be replacing many benefits, e.g. jobseekers allowance, that currently entitle children of qualifying parents to free school meals. In light of this, the Department for Education has introduced new criteria for free school meals eligibility, with all families in receipt of Universal Credit and earning an annual income of £7,400 or lower entitled to free school meals.

From 1 April 2018, all **existing** free school meals claimants will continue to receive free school meals whilst Universal Credit is rolled out (currently scheduled to complete in March 2022). This will apply even if their circumstances change and their earnings rise above the new threshold during the rollout period. In addition, any child who **gains eligibility** for free school meals after 1 April 2018 (e.g. in July 2019), will also continue to receive free school meals during the Universal Credit rollout period. This protection is referred to as transitional protection.

Once Universal Credit is fully rolled out, 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).

During the rollout of Universal Credit, the protection arrangements mean that **once a pupil has claimed free school meals and has been found eligible, there is no requirement from the Department for further eligibility checks to be undertaken**. Schools should continue to record pupils claiming free school meals – including those being transitionally protected – as eligible for free school meals on the termly school census, as they do now.

All local authorities have access to the Department's Eligibility Checking System (ECS), which provides a simple and rapid online portal for determining households' eligibility for free school meals, and other early education entitlements. Maintained schools, academies and free schools are all able to use the ECS through local authorities.

If a parent feels that the result returned by the ECS is inaccurate, they may provide the equivalent paper-based evidence to their local authority who must then complete a manual check. Manual checks will also be required for parents who are self-employed and claiming Universal Credit.

To help schools identify the number of pupils claiming free school meals, and those pupils receiving protection, schools will have the ability to check through the Key to Success download. This functionality will be available later this year, and further information will be provided by the Department for Education then.

For more information, please see the guidance published by the Department for Education at the following address:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools-and-local-authorities>

Free School Meals/Pupil Premium Payment – Notes for Guidance from April 2018

School meals are a great way to ensure your child is eating a healthy and well-balanced meal during the school day.

School meals meet the Government's rigorous nutritional standards, which have been put in place to make meals healthier and give children what they need to develop, grow and lead a healthy and active lifestyle.

From September 2014 there has been legal duty on state-funded schools in England to offer a free school meal to Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 pupils. However in order for your child's school to benefit from the additional Pupil Premium funding it is still necessary for parents in receipt of one or more of the qualifying benefits listed below to complete either an online or paper Free School Meal/Pupil Premium Payment application.

Free School Meal/Pupil Premium entitlement for pupils attending Bromley schools is processed by Pupil Benefits at Bromley Civic Centre, unless the school/academy has elected to administer their own claims. Please check with your child's school.

Frequently Asked Questions

Am I Eligible?

Your child is entitled to Free School Meals if you or your partner (living at the same address) receive one or more of the following:

- > Universal Credit – with an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400 as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods
- > Income Support
- > Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance
- > Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- > Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit
- > Support from the National Asylum Support Services (NASS) under Part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- > Child Tax Credit provided you are 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

You can also receive Free School Meals if you are a pupil receiving a qualifying benefit.

Can I still claim Free School Meals/Pupil Premium Payment if I receive Working Tax Credits?

You are only eligible to apply for Free School Meals/Pupil Premium Payment if you receive one of the qualifying benefits. Where a parent/carer is entitled to Working Tax Credits during a 4-week period immediately after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit, they are eligible to claim Free School Meals for that 4-week period only. In this circumstance we will be unable to confirm eligibility using the Eligibility Checking service, so it will be your responsibility to provide a copy of your Tax Credit Decision Notice.

How do I Apply?

Apply online at www.bromley.gov.uk – **Apply for it – Free School Meals/Pupil Premium Payment**

Or

Complete a paper form available from your child's school/academy or from Pupil Benefits at Bromley Council.

Do I need to provide proof of my claim?

When you apply we are able to directly check your entitlement using the Eligibility Checking Service (provided by the Department for Education). You will only be asked to provide paper proof of the benefit you currently receive if your eligibility is not confirmed.

Renewing a claim for Free School Meals/Pupil Premium Payment

From April 2018 the Government has updated the criteria for determining free school meals to reflect the introduction of Universal Credit and the phasing out of other income-based benefits.

As a result, from April 2018 all existing free school meal claimants will continue to receive free school meals during the Universal Credit roll out period (expected to be completed by March 2022) and therefore will not need to submit claims on an annual basis.

Claims will need to be made for new pupils even if there is current sibling entitlement which may result in younger children not being entitled whilst older siblings are protected by the transitional arrangements.

How soon will my child receive a Free School Meal?

For all applications received prior to the start of the academic year, we are committed to processing and advising you and the appropriate school/Academy of your child(ren)'s entitlement to Free School Meals/Pupil Premium Payment as quickly as possible so there is no delay in the meals starting. Applications received by us after the start of the academic year will, where possible, be processed within 5 school days.

What happens once my claim has been processed?

We will send you a letter when your application has been processed confirming your child is eligible for Free School Meals/Pupil Premium Payment. Confirmation of eligibility will also be sent to your child(ren)'s current school/s.

Can my claim be back dated?

This policy is at the discretion of the school or Academy that your child(ren) attends.

NB: Please note that your claim will be processed via the Eligibility Checking Service and will commence from the date that this service is accessed. If this date is after the start of the academic year it will be your responsibility to provide paper evidence that your benefits commenced on or before the start of the school year before any backdated Free School Meals/Pupil Premium claim can be considered.

Can I appeal against the Free School Meals/Pupil Premium decision?

Local Authorities do not set the qualifying criteria for Free School Meals/Pupil Premium. Any change to the criteria is a matter for central, not local Government.



**Pupil Benefits
Education, Care and Health Services**

Application for Free School Meals/Pupil Premium Payment from April 2018

This form should only be submitted if your child attends a school in the London Borough of Bromley and does not currently receive Free School Meals.

Free School Meals are available to pupils in full-time education whose parent/carer receives one of the benefits listed below. Children attending part time nursery provision or independent schools are NOT entitled to Free School Meals.

Please note that Free School Meal applications for pupils attending Harris Girls' Academy Bromley, Harris Academy Beckenham or Coopers School should be made direct to the school/academy.

Please tick one <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Current Qualifying Benefits
<input type="checkbox"/>	Universal Credit – with an annual net earned income of no more than £7,400 as assessed by earnings from up to three of your most recent assessment periods.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Income Support
<input type="checkbox"/>	Income Based Jobseeker's Allowance/ Income Related Employment and Support Allowance
<input type="checkbox"/>	Guarantee element of Pension Credit
<input type="checkbox"/>	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)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Support from NASS under Part 6 of the Immigration & Asylum Act 1999
<input type="checkbox"/>	Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

Section 1: Details of the Parent/Carer claiming one of the benefits above.

Your application cannot be processed unless ALL the following details are provided.

Is this your first application?		Surname	
Title (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms)		First Name/s	
National Insurance No. or NASS (Asylum Seekers) No.			
Date of Birth		Relationship to child/ren listed below	
Address			
		Date of moving to this address	
Postcode		Telephone No.	
Email Address			

Section 2: Details of children living with applicant, attending relevant Bromley schools and not currently in receipt of Free School Meals.

Full names of children attending relevant Bromley Schools		Date of Birth	Girl/Boy	School attended / to be attended
Surname	First Name			

NB. If you are a foster parent you will not be able to claim for any foster children unless you are in receipt of one or more of the qualifying benefits shown above.

