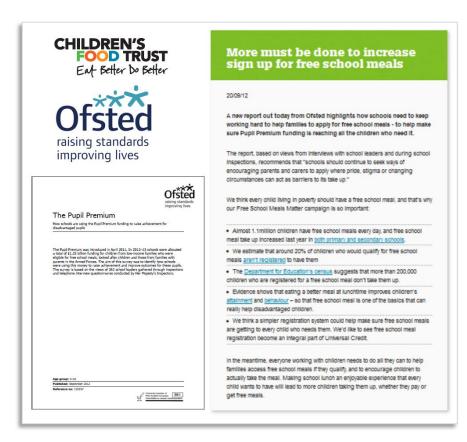


Encouraging Take-up of Free School Meals

Encouraging take-up of free school meals is one of the biggest challenges facing schools and local authorities. Often, the greatest barrier is the stigma felt by both the parents and carers and the children themselves. No system can be totally stigma-free but an online application system is the best method for reducing this to a minimum.



"Schools should continue to seek ways to encourage parents and carers to apply for free school meals where pride, stigma or changing circumstances act as barriers to its take-up."

[The Pupil Premium]

"We think a simpler registration system could help make sure free school meals are getting to every child who needs them."

[Children's Food Trust]

The Main Messages

The DfE's web site suggests that schools should consider letting parents know:

- That registering their child as eligible for FSM will bring more money to the school to help their child achieve.
- What the school will spend the Pupil Premium on, so they are incentivised to apply.
- What, if any, other benefits may be available for children registered as eligible for FSM, i.e. help with the cost of music lessons or school trips.
- That registering for FSM is confidential and their peers, and their child's peers, will not know they have applied.
- What registering for FSM involves and what it means for their child, including the fact that taking up the meal is recommended but optional.
- The benefits and quality of school meals.

Useful Resources

Department for Education

The DfE's web page <u>Increasing registrations for FSM and the Pupil Premium</u> includes a downloadable template for a letter to parents that can be customised by an individual school. It should be noted that this template letter is not up-to-date and quotes the wrong Pupil Premium amount – see our <u>Pupil Premium</u> [LINK TO NEW PAGE REQUIRED] page for up-to-date details of allocations.

Children's Food Trust

The Children's Food Trust's web page <u>Practical resources to help schools increase the take up of free school meals</u> provides links to downloadable resources which all schools will find useful as a basis for a strategy to encourage take-up. The page also includes a link to language translations of its parents' leaflet. It should be noted that these resources are not fully up-to-date and the following should be noted:

- the eligibility criteria for free school meals also include the Working Tax Credit 'run-on' (and will include Universal Credit);
- the Pupil Premium allocation quoted for free school meals children is incorrect see our <u>Pupil Premium</u> [LINK TO NEW PAGE REQUIRED] page for up-to-date details of allocations; and
- the latest government figures for the cost to parents of providing a meal for their child is over £400 per year.