



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.



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More must be done to increase sign up for free school meals

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A new report out today from Ofsted highlights how schools need to keep working hard to help families to apply for free school meals - to help make sure Pupil Premium funding is reaching all the children who need it.

The report, based on views from interviews with school leaders and during school inspections, recommends that "schools should continue to seek ways of encouraging parents and carers to apply where pride, stigma or changing circumstances can act as barriers to its take up."

We think every child living in poverty should have a free school meal, and that's why our Free School Meals Matter campaign is so important.

- Almost 1.1million children have free school meals every day, and free school meal take up increased last year in [both primary and secondary schools](#).
- We estimate that around 20% of children who would qualify for free school meals [aren't registered](#) to have them
- The [Department for Education's census](#) suggests that more than 200,000 children who are registered for a free school meal don't take them up.
- Evidence shows that eating a better meal at lunchtime improves children's [attainment](#) and [behaviour](#) – so that free school meal is one of the basics that can really help disadvantaged children.
- We think a simpler registration system could help make sure free school meals are getting to every child who needs them. We'd like to see free school meal registration become an integral part of Universal Credit.

In the meantime, everyone working with children needs to do all they can to help families access free school meals if they qualify, and to encourage children to actually take the meal. Making school lunch an enjoyable experience that every child wants to have will lead to more children taking them up, whether they pay or get free meals.

The Pupil Premium
How schools are using the Pupil Premium funding to raise achievement for disadvantaged pupils

The Pupil Premium was introduced in April 2011. In 2012-13 schools were allocated a total of £1.25 billion funding for children from low-income families who were eligible for free school meals, looked after children and those from families with parents in the Armed Forces. The aim of this survey was to identify how schools were using this money to raise achievement and improve outcomes for these pupils. The survey is based on the views of 262 school leaders gathered through inspections and telephone interview questionnaires conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectors.

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[[The Pupil Premium](#)]

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[[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 [Increasing registrations for FSM and the Pupil Premium](#) 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 [Pupil Premium \[LINK TO NEW PAGE REQUIRED\]](#) page for up-to-date details of allocations.

Children's Food Trust

The Children's Food Trust's web page [Practical resources to help schools increase the take up of free school meals](#) 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 [Pupil Premium \[LINK TO NEW PAGE REQUIRED\]](#) 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.