

Free School Meals FAQ's - Parents/Guardians

What criteria do I need to meet in order for my child to be eligible for Free School Meals?

Your child must attend a maintained school or receive alternative education approved by Kent County Council.

Children attending private or independent schools are not eligible to receive Free School Meals.

Your child may be eligible for Free School Meals if you are in receipt of the following:

- Universal Credit - if you apply on or after 1st April 2018 your household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you receive)
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- 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)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit.

Do I need to make a new application if my child is moving to a Kent school from outside of the area and already receives Free School Meals?

No, you do not need to complete a new application. Your child's previous school should be able to issue confirmation to the new school, advising them that your child is already receiving Free School Meals and the new school will manage this locally.

What if my child's school does not appear on the dropdown list when I am making an application?

If your child's school does not appear on the dropdown list, this will be because the school does not use our Free School Meals service. You will therefore need to contact the school directly to find out their process.

What should I do if my application is found to be 'not eligible', but I believe it should be?

If an application is found not eligible, it may not necessarily mean that you do not meet the criteria. If for example, you are new to receiving a benefit, our system may not have these updated details right away. In such cases, our team will need to investigate your application further.

If you believe your application should be eligible, please email us at freeschoolmeals@kent.gov.uk confirming your name, your child's name, DOB and application reference number and send us evidence of your benefits. If the evidence provided meets the criteria to make an application eligible, we will ensure our system is updated to reflect this.

Do I need to make a new application each year?

No, you will only need to apply once, unless advised otherwise by us directly. You do not need to submit a new application each year.

Do I need to advise you if my child moves school over the summer?

Prior to the summer holidays, we contacted the schools that use our system, asking them to provide details of the children leaving their school and confirm which school they are moving to. Providing they are moving to another school that use our system, we updated our records over the summer, ready for the new school year. You can liaise with your child's new school once they start, to ensure the changes have been made.

Why is my eldest child eligible for Free School Meals, but my younger child is not?

Eligibility for Free School Meals is based on your circumstances at the time the application is made. This means that younger children will not become entitled to Free School Meals simply

because their older sibling is in receipt of them already. If a child was eligible at the time that the application was made, their eligibility would remain protected, however, if your circumstances have since changed, and you would no longer meet the criteria for Free School Meals, a new application may be found 'not eligible'.

What is “Transitional Protection”?

From 1st April 2018, transitional protections were implemented for pupils who might otherwise have lost Free School Meals following the update to the eligibility criteria. The transitional protections were awarded as follows:

- Any pupil who is in receipt of Free School Meals immediately prior to 1st April 2018 will continue to receive Free School Meals whilst Universal Credit is rolled out. This applies even if they no longer meet the eligibility criteria during that time.
- Any pupil who gains eligibility for Free School Meals after 1st April 2018 will continue to receive Free School Meals during the Universal Credit rollout period. This applies even if they no longer meet the eligibility criteria at a subsequent point during the rollout period.

Once Universal Credit is fully rolled out, any existing pupil who no longer meets the eligibility criteria at that point will continue to receive Free School Meals until the end of their current phase of education, i.e. primary or secondary.

The Universal Credit rollout is currently expected to complete in March 2022.

What do I need to do if my financial circumstances change?

As per the above, eligible applications will be protected until March 2022. If you do not wish for your child to continue receiving Free School Meals, please email us at freeschoolmeals@kent.gov.uk and we can make the application inactive.

What do I need to do if my personal details change?

If your personal details change, please inform your child's school so this can be amended on their application.

Who do I contact if I have an issue with a Free School Meals voucher?

You will need to liaise with your child's school directly if you have an issue with your voucher.