

Free school meals

From September 2014 there will be two free school meal schemes - Universal Infant Free School Meals and Income Related Free School Meals.

Universal infant free school meals

From September 2014 Central Government plan to introduce a new initiative to provide free school meals to all children attending Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 regardless of their parents income levels. Should you wish your child to receive a school meal under this initiative then please contact your school as there is no requirement to register with Cheshire East Council.

Income related free school meals

Cheshire East Council will continue to award free school meals to the families that receive the qualifying incomes as outlined below, and whose children attend a Cheshire East school.

Parents/Guardians whose children attend schools outside Cheshire East need to contact the Local Authority in which the school is situated.

Income support (IS)

Income Based Jobseekers Allowance (IBJSA)

Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA(IR) support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

Child Tax Credit, provided you are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual income (as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs) that does not exceed£16,190.

The Guarantee element of State Pension Credit.

Children who receive Income Support or Income Based Job Seekers Allowance in their own right are also entitled to receive free school meals.

Universal Credit

If you have recently become unemployed or have reduced your working hours and have been granted the four week working tax credits run on, then you may be entitled to free school meals. Please call our Schools Team on 0300 123 5012 for advice.

It should be noted that children who receive "education suitable for children who have not attained compulsory school age" will still need to satisfy the additional requirement of "receiving education both before and after the lunch period", before being eligible to receive free school meals.

Pupil premium

Schools receive additional funding for pupils registered with Cheshire East Council for Income Related Free School Meals. If you are in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits you should still apply to Cheshire East Council for Income Related Free School Meals, even if your child will be eligible under the Universal Infant Free School Meal scheme, as this will allow your child's school to benefit from the Pupil Premium funding.

If you think you are eligible for income related free school meals

All you have to do is phone the number below and we will let you know if the Children in your care are entitled to Free School Meals.

Free School Meals Helpline - 0300 123 5012. Alternatively you can complete the Free School Meals enquiry form online.

We will assess your claim using our eligibility checker to confirm your entitlement; if successful your claim will begin the same day. If your claim is not successful or if we require any further information we will contact you by phone or email.

What happens next?

Your entitlement will begin on the day your fully completed application form with the required proof of eligibility is received at the Customer Contact Centre not the date you become eligible to any of the stated benefits. We are unable to backdate claims for Free School Meals to cover unpaid dinner money, or to refund any dinner money paid prior to the date of a successful application. A letter of entitlement will be issued to you by this office.

How are the arrangements reviewed?

Eligibility for free school meals is reviewed periodically and providing you are still eligible your claim will be renewed automatically. It may be necessary for parents/carers to re-apply completing an application form; this will be sent out to you if required. It is the responsibility of the claimant and not that of the school to ensure that we have the correct information.

You must notify the Customer Contact Centre:-

If you stop receiving any of the stated benefits or commence receiving Working Tax Credit

Your child changes school or leaves school

You change your address

If you do not notify us of any changes in your circumstances then you may be invoiced for the cost of any free school meals taken that you were not entitled to.

Can I appeal against the free school meals eligibility criteria?

Local Authorities do not set the qualifying criteria for free school meals and we are unable to waive them. Any change to the criteria is a matter for central, not local government so your Member of Parliament is the appropriate person to contact about this issue.