

My child will be in Reception, Year 1 or Year 2 but my application has been unsuccessful.

If your child will be in Reception, Year 1 or Year 2 and your application has been unsuccessful – don't worry, they will still receive a meal under the "Universal Entitlement" scheme. You can arrange this directly with the school.

The fact that you have submitted an application will help ensure the school receive all of the funding they are entitled to. You will be automatically notified if the status of your application changes.

I receive Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit, can I claim free school meals for the children?

Unfortunately there is no free school meals eligibility if you are entitled to Working Tax Credit, regardless of income.

Although my family is entitled to Working Tax Credit our annual income is less than the upper threshold of £16,190. Why don't we qualify?

The upper annual income threshold of £16,190 applies to families who receive Child Tax Credit but have no entitlement to Working Tax Credit.

I have been told that I can claim free school meals if I lose my job, even though I am still receiving Working Tax Credit. Is that true?

Where a parent/carer is entitled to Working Tax Credit during a 4-week 'run-on' period immediately after their employment ends or they no longer qualify for Working Tax Credit, then they are eligible to claim free school meals for that 4-week period.

Unfortunately as we are unable to confirm eligibility using the Eligibility Checking Service we will need to corroborate this with the tax office before we can grant free school meals.

I claim Job Seekers Allowance but I have been told I don't qualify for free school meals. Why?

If you are in receipt of Income-Based Job Seeker's Allowance you are eligible to claim free school meals. Contribution-Based Job Seeker's Allowance is not a qualifying benefit.

Please be aware that if you receive both Income-Based and Contribution-Based Job Seeker's Allowance and you receive the same amount for both then you should qualify for free school meals. You should also qualify if you receive both but the Income-based amount is greater, but not if the contribution-based amount is greater.

I receive Incapacity Benefit & Personal Independence Payment (PIP). Do I qualify for free school meals?

Neither Incapacity Benefit nor PIP are qualifying benefits for free school meals. Unless you have been awarded one of the benefits listed on the webpage you will not be eligible to claim free school meals.

I receive Employment and Support Allowance. Do I qualify for free school meals?

If you are in receipt of Income-related Employment & Support Allowance you are eligible to claim free school meals. Contribution-Based Employment & Support Allowance is not a qualifying benefit.

Please be aware that if you receive both Income-Based and Contribution-Based Job Seeker's Allowance and you receive the same amount for both then you should qualify for free school meals. You should also qualify if you receive both but the Income-based amount is greater, but not if the contribution-based amount is greater.

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.

Due to family circumstances my grandchild has come to live with me. Can I claim free school meals for her?

As the child's carer you are eligible to claim free school meals for her if you are in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits. Either of her parents is also eligible to claim for free school meals for the child, even though she is currently residing with you, providing they claim a qualifying benefit.

My child attends a Warwickshire County Council school but we live outside of the county. Which local authority do I apply to for free school meals?

You need to apply to Warwickshire County Council for your child's free school meals if he/she is attending a Warwickshire maintained school, academy or nursery.

Do I need to provide proof of my benefit claim?

When you apply online or by telephone we are able to directly check your entitlement using the Eligibility Checking Service provided by the Department for Education. If you

apply online the outcome of your application will be confirmed by email shortly after submission. You will only be asked to provide current documentary evidence of which benefit you receive if your eligibility cannot be confirmed in this way.

Once I have applied and my claim has been accepted how soon will my child receive a free school meal?

We are committed to processing your application and advising the appropriate school about your child's entitlement as quickly as possible so that there is no delay in free school meals starting. However due to varying school administration requirements it is not always possible to guarantee a same-day service.

All applications received by us should be processed within 3 working days and we will confirm your entitlement in writing.

Will my child's entitlement to free school meals be backdated to the date my benefit started so that I can claim a refund of the dinner money I've paid?

Department for Education policy states that a local authority has no legal responsibility to provide a free school meal to a child, who may be otherwise eligible, where no application has been made. Unfortunately, we are unable to backdate entitlement to free school meals to cover unpaid school dinner money, or to refund dinner money paid prior to the date of a successful application.

How will my child get his/her free school meal?

We will contact the school your child attends by e-mail when your application has been processed. The school also has constant access to an up to date list of eligible students.

Most secondary schools now use a Smartcard or biometric system to administer school meals, and if your child is entitled to a free school meal the allowance should be input into their account by the school in time for the lunch break each day. However as secondary schools are able to set their own catering budgets, and therefore their own FSM Allowance, the amount will vary from school to school. We suggest that you contact the school your child attends for further details.

Who should I notify about any change of circumstances, school or to my address during the school year?

Please call 01926 742543 or email freemeals@warwickshire.gov.uk Please be aware that is your responsibility (not that of the school) to notify us about any of these changes.

I want my child to have a balanced meal. What food will be provided as a free school meal?

The school your child attends will be able to advise you about their weekly lunch menu. You can also read more about Warwickshire's commitment to healthy eating on the School Meals webpage at <https://educaterers.co.uk/>

As I qualify for free school meals can I also apply for help with the cost of my child's school uniform?

There is no requirement under the Education Act 2005 for local authorities to fund a uniform clothing allowance and this is not available from Warwickshire County Council. You may however wish to contact the school to see if they have an in-house scheme to assist with uniform costs.

Somebody else's child has come to live with me (eg fostering). Can I claim free school meals for the child?

As the child's carer, you are eligible to claim free school meals for them if you are in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits.

I receive equal based Employment & Support Allowance and/or Job Seekers Allowance. Do I qualify for free school meals?

Yes, you do.

Is my child entitled to free school milk?

Please contact your child's school to find out whether this is available and how to request it.

My child is eligible for free school meals but the school haven't been providing a meal, what should I do?

In the first instance, you should contact the school to make sure your child is showing on their free school meal list and to find out why this is happening. If the school say that your child is not on the list, please call the free school meals team to discuss further.

My child's school has sent us a letter / form to apply for free school meals, do I have to complete it?

Schools often conduct "drives" for free school meals but you should only complete and return the form or apply online if your child does not currently receive free school meals (with the exception of Universal Entitlement).

My child is moving to a Warwickshire school having previously been at a school outside of the County, do their details get transferred across automatically?

No – you will need to make a new application through Warwickshire County Council by visiting the website www.warwickshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals or by calling the customer service centre on [01926 359189](tel:01926359189).

My child was eligible for free school meals at their old school in another County but when applying through Warwickshire you have told me that I am not entitled to claim free school meals. What should I do?

Please alert us to the fact that your child was eligible at their previous school, this may mean that they have "protected status". We can check census data to confirm whether this is the case and can correct our records where needed.

What do the changes to Universal Credit mean to my eligibility?

From April 2018 an annual income threshold was introduced to Universal Credit (UC). This means that if you are a new applicant and receive UC, you must earn less than £7,400 per annum to be eligible for free school meals. If you are confirmed as eligible then your entitlement will be frozen until March 2025. This means that no further eligibility checks will be conducted and your child(ren) will receive free school meals until this date or until the end of your child's current phase of education, whichever is later. This is regardless of any change in your financial circumstances.

If you were eligible for free school meals on 1st April 2018 then your entitlement is also frozen until March 2025.

Can I cancel my claim for free school meals?

You can, however please be aware that this may affect any financial support you currently receive from the school. If you are cancelling due to a change in your financial situation, e.g. you have started work or are now earning more, please be aware of protected status (detailed in the question above).

**I have further questions regarding free school meals.
Who can I speak to?**

For more information about free school meals you can contact the Customer Service Centre:

Telephone: [01926 359189](tel:01926359189) (Mon – Fri: 8am – 6.30pm, Sat: 9am – 1pm)

OR

E-mail: freemeals@warwickshire.gov.uk