**Why should I apply for a free school meal?**

Even if you are having financial difficulties you shouldn't have to worry about your child getting the nourishment, they need to grow strong and healthy. Did you know:

* you can claim free school meals if you receive child benefit and any of the benefits mentioned below
* your child's school will also get extra funding if you apply
* it could save you just under £400 a year
* the menu is varied to cater for all tastes and uses quality ingredients from local suppliers - meals can be provided either at your child`s school, in take away format or by voucher. If you are eligible, please check with the school.
* it's quick and easy to apply - you can even do this over the phone
* you don't need to provide any evidence
* no one will know your child is getting free school meals on the basis of your income.

**Who can get a free school meal?**

Your child will qualify for free school meals if you meet the following criteria:

* you or your partner receive child benefit (for the child you are applying for), and
* the child is in full time education, under 19 years of age, and
* the child attends a local authority school or sixth form (but not a sixth form college). If your child attends nursery, attendance must be full-time, and your child must attend before and after lunch in a nursery run by Gateshead Council. This still applies even if your child is presently unable to attend school because of the COVID-19 restrictions on schools being open.

You and your partner must be in receipt of one of the following benefits:

* Income Support
* Income Based Job Seekers Allowance (JSA - IB)
* Guarantee Pension Credit
* Income Related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA Income Related)
* Child Tax Credit - but not Working Tax Credit - and your income for Tax Credit purposes must be less than £16,190.00 (details are shown on your Tax Credit award notice)
* Working Tax Credit Run-on
* Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
* Universal Credit and your net earned family income is less than £7,400.

Receipt of one of the above benefits will be checked with the relevant government departments (HMRC, DWP and Home Office) and this may be done via the Eligibility Checking Service. By signing the declaration on the application form, you are giving your consent for us to check your eligibility through this service.

**Extra funding for your child's school**

For every valid application for free school meals, not only will your child receive a healthy, nutritious meal, but your child's school can claim:

* £1,320 per pupil in reception to year 6
* £935 per pupil in years 7 to 11

The school can claim this funding each year for six years, which can really help to provide the best environment to support your child's learning and development.

If you qualify, the school or schools that your child or children attend will be informed and means-tested free school meals will be available immediately. Please check with the school to see how they will make a meal available to you during the current COVID-19 situation.

If your child was entitled to receive a free school meal on April 1 2018, or became entitled at any time after this date, in the majority of cases they will be protected to receive their free meal until Universal Credit has been fully rolled out.

This is estimated not to be until at least March 31 2022. Once Universal Credit is fully rolled out, your child will then continue to receive a free school meal until the end of their current phase of education. Or when they leave school, whichever is the earliest.

You do not need to tell us if your circumstances change unless:

* your child changes school or you move out of the area
* you have moved into the area
* you stop being responsible for the child or children concerned
* you no longer give us consent to use the information provided or no longer wish your child to receive a free school meal

You can report any changes by telephone or email using the contact details below.

If there is a change to your child or children's eligibility for free school meals, we will automatically notify the relevant school.

**NB:**

f you are applying for free school meals because you receive support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 then you must phone us on 0191 433 4848, visit us at the Benefit Section, Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead, NE8 1HH or email **benefitsfsm@gateshead.gov.uk**