

Free School Meals – frequently asked questions

1. Why is it important to register for free school meals?

Applying for free school meals is very important because the amount of money that your child's school receives from central government depends on the number of children registered as entitled to free school meals. In 2012/13, schools will get an additional £600 of funding for every child registered as eligible for free school meals. This money can be spent on support for students and extra-curricular activities.

The government has also stated that it is keen for universities to actively recruit pupils that have previously received free school meals so it is important that those eligible for free school meals do register for them.

Most importantly, taking up free school meals will save you around £360 per year per child and enable your child to have a balanced and nutritious lunch.

2. What do I do if my child is at nursery or primary school?

Islington currently provides universal free school meals to all nursery and primary school pupils aged three and above if a Free School Meals Registration Form has been completed by their parent/carer. You must complete a Free School Meals Registration Form in order for your child to receive their school meal.

3. What do I do if my child is at secondary school?

Secondary school pupils can only receive a free school meal if their parent/carer is eligible and if a Free School Meals Application Form has been completed. You must therefore complete a Free School Meals Application Form so that your eligibility can be checked by the Free School Meals Team. If you are eligible, your child can then take up their free school meal.

All secondary schools in Islington now operate a cashless lunch system – please contact your school to find out how their lunch payment system works in practice.

4. What do I do if my child is over 16?

Over 16s can still receive free school meals if they are staying in education at a sixth form only – it does not apply to pupils attending a Further Education College. You should complete a Free School Meals Application Form. The process is the same as the process for secondary school applications.

All year 11 pupils applying for the 16-19 bursary fund to help with their place in sixth form in the following year will need to complete a free school meals application form in order to apply for the bursary.

The 16-19 bursary is the new fund available to support students aged 16 to 19 to stay in education and is the replacement for the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

5. What do I do if my child attends an Academy?

Academies process their own applications for free school meals. If your child attends an academy, please contact them directly.

6. What happens after I make my application?

We will let the school know whether or not your child is entitled to free school meals. Your child will then be able to take up their free school meal if eligible.

We may also contact you if we need further information to process your application.

7. What happens if I don't complete all parts of the form?

We cannot process your application unless all sections of the form are completed. If you fail to fill in any parts of the form your application will be delayed and we will ask you to provide the missing information. If you fail to provide the missing information your application will not be processed.

Your child will not be able to receive their free school meal until your form is fully completed and processed.

8. Do you need proof of my benefits?

You do not have to provide proof of benefits when completing the Free School Meals Application Form as we can check for eligibility against a central government database, providing that all sections of the form have been completed.

If our checks indicate that you are not entitled to free school meals and you think that you should be entitled, we may have to ask for proof of the benefit you are receiving so that we can double check that the details we hold are correct.

9. What if my circumstances change?

If a previous application for free school meals was not successful and a change in your circumstances means that you think you may now be eligible please contact the Free School Meals Team. You will need to complete another application form.

If your child currently receives a free school meal and you start work, start to receive Working Tax Credit, or stop receiving one of the qualifying benefits you must notify us as soon as possible.

10. Can my claim be backdated?

It is important that you apply as soon as possible as we are unable to backdate claims for free school meals to cover unpaid dinner money, or to refund dinner money paid prior to the date of a successful application.

11. What if my child changes school?

If your child is changing schools within Islington: You do not have to reapply for free school meals but you should contact the Free School Meals Team to let them know. The Free School Meals Team will then let the new school know if your child is entitled to free school meals.

If your child is moving to a school outside Islington: Each local authority deals with free school meals in different ways so you should contact the school your child is going to go to and ask them how to apply for free school meals in that local authority.

12. Do I have to renew my claim every year?

Yes, you will need to fill out a Free School Meals Application Form before the start of each school year. It is an audit requirement that this process and associated data is revisited on an annual basis. In order to comply with this we require that all parents/carers complete and sign a new form for each year.

It is very important to maintain accurate records of pupils who are eligible for free school meals as any reduction in these numbers will affect the level of funding attracted by the school. Please help us to ensure that Islington's schools are as well funded as possible.

If your circumstances change you must inform us as soon as possible. You will need to reapply if you have previously not been eligible for free school meals but think that you are now eligible.

Further information: If you need further information or have any questions about eligibility for free school meals or the application process, please contact the Free School Meals Team on 020 7527 5483 or 020 7527 4336.