

Information for Headteachers

A guide to help schools increase the numbers of eligible pupils claiming free school meals

Background

Parents on the following benefits are entitled to free school meals (FSM) for their children who are in full-time education if they receive:

- Income support
- Income-based Job Seeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The Guarantee Element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit with an annual household income of less than £16,190 and do not get Working Tax Credit

Information released by the DfE in November 2012 showed that 4,000 pupils eligible for FSM in Lincolnshire are not claiming them – 20% of eligible children.

Each child claiming FSM entitles their school to claim £900 pupil premium (expected to rise to £1200 in April 2014). The pupil premium was introduced in April 2011 and is allocated to schools to work with pupils who have been registered for free school meals at any point in the last six years (known as 'Ever 6 FSM').

Why do some families not claim FSM for their children?

According to several national surveys, there are many reasons why parents do not claim FSM for their children – preferring to send them with a packed lunch, or paying for meals themselves.

Often the social stigma of other children knowing that a child is on FSM is sufficient to prevent parents claiming FSM. This is not thought to be much of an issue in primary schools as parents either pay weekly, monthly or termly so other children don't know who pays and who does not.

Social stigma can be an issue in secondary schools. Many secondary schools in Lincolnshire now have a cashless system which eliminates this barrier.

Another reason given by parents when asked why they do not claim FSM for their children is that their children want to sit next to friends who take a packed lunch. If the packed lunch children eat in a different part of the school hall or another room then children who could be eligible for FSM will ask parents for packed lunch so they can sit next to their friends. Surveys have shown that if children who take a packed lunch can sit next to those eating a school meal, free or not, then they are more likely to choose a school lunch. Children want to sit next to who they choose. This can be a difficult issue for some schools to address because of the size of the school hall.

Recent research from the Government found that those not claiming FSM are often:

- Pupils living in a less deprived area
- Pupils attending schools with a lower school FSM rate
- Pupils from families with higher status occupations (i.e. professional rather than routine occupations)
- Pupils living in a family with higher parental qualifications.

The application process

An online application form is now on the Lincolnshire County Council website. This has been set up to make the application process as easy as possible for parents. It also means that parents, if they wish, do not have to ask their school for a form. Parents can still apply on the paper form or via the school office.

For more information on free school meals please go to the Lincolnshire County Council website www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals

Suggestions for schools to increase school meal numbers

School newsletters

Please include a paragraph on free school meals in every edition of your school newsletters.

Posters

We have sent each school a Free School Meal poster for display purposes and a quantity of fsm postcards in different languages.

Text messaging

Please consider sending a text message to your parents every few months. For example:

Free School Meals. Have you claimed yet? It's easy to apply at www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/fsmapply or ask the school office for a form.

School website

Please consider including a section on free school meals on your website. Please include the link to the online application form.

www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/fsmapply

New starters

In June/July please ensure you promote free school meals and make sure that information is sent home with all your new starters (reception, year 3 and year 7 as appropriate). Free school meal postcards are available in pdf on the Lincolnshire County Council website.

Armed Services Funding

Schools receive a Service Premium worth £300 per pupil per year for pupils that have parents in the armed services or whose parents receive a pension from the armed services. This additional funding is to help the school address the particular challenges that these pupils face.