

# DfE Free School Meals

Free school meals are a statutory benefit in the UK providing nutritious meals to children from qualifying low-income households. Eligibility is based on receiving specific government benefits, and applying can also unlock extra school funding and holiday activity programs.

- [Free school meals: guidance for local authorities, local -authority-maintained schools, academies and free schools - GOV.UK](#),
- [Expanding free school meals: what parents need to know – The Education Hub](#)

## Universal vs. Income-Related Meals

- **Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM):** In England, all children in Reception, Year 1, and Year 2 automatically receive free hot lunches, regardless of household income.

## Qualifying Benefits

To claim means-tested free school meals in England and Wales, families must usually receive one of the following:

- **Universal Credit:** (Annual net earned income must be no more than £7,400).
- **Income Support** or **Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)**.
- **Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)**.
- **Child Tax Credit:** (Provided you are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and earn no more than £16,190 annually).
- **Pension Credit:** (Guarantee element).

*Note: Children who receive these benefits directly in their own right are also eligible.*

## Why You Should Apply (Even if eligible for Universal meals)

If your child is in Reception, Year 1, or Year 2 (or attends school in London), you should still complete a formal free school meals application. Doing so triggers **Pupil Premium**—extra funding given directly to your child's school to provide valuable resources, tutoring, and support.

## How to Apply

Applications are handled directly by your local council. You can easily check if you qualify and locate your local council's online application portal using the GOV.UK Apply for Free School Meals tool.

- [\[Apply for free school meals - GOV.UK\]](#),
- [Free school meals and other benefits | Hertfordshire County Council](#)