



# The Northumberland Church of England Academy

JOSEPHINE BUTLER CAMPUS

Inspiring achievement  
Encouraging compassion

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5 December 2011

Dear Parent/Carer

## **Registering for Free School Meals**

If you are in receipt of benefits or are working and on a low income, your child may be entitled to receive Free School Meals and other benefits.

**Every child registered will receive Free School Meals worth over £350 a year.**

Also the Government is giving money to schools to help children from lower income families do their very best. This funding is called a 'Pupil Premium' and is paid to the Academy for each child receiving free school meals.

So by registering for free school meals parents can not only receive the benefit of free school meals for their children but will also improve the funding received by the Academy for the benefit of the learners.

If you are registered for Free School Meals you could also get

- Free milk - in First or Special Schools milk at break-time will be free
- Help with music tuition and instruments.
- Help with curriculum related residential trips or school visits.

Registering will be treated in strict confidence and it will not affect any other benefits you are claiming.

**Please register before Christmas to make sure your child and others in their class don't miss out.**

Information about eligibility and how to claim is set out in the enclosed pages.

Please inform the Campus office that you have made an application so that you may receive the benefit as soon as possible.

If you require any assistance with completing the application then please contact the Academy.

Yours faithfully

Dr M Pitkethly  
Principal Director Operations

## Background

Free School Meals (FSM) are not provided automatically. The parent, guardian or learner needs to complete an application and provide up-to-date proof of benefit from the time their benefit begins. An application cannot be made retrospectively, the FSM process is a set criteria and there is no appeals process.

Children who receive Income Support (IS) or Income Based Jobseekers Allowance (IBJSA) in their own right are also entitled to claim free meals under the same application process.

Refunds for free school meals are only made in exceptional circumstances. These are handled on an individual basis.

## Are you eligible?

**To be eligible for help you need to be in one of the following categories:**

- Receive Income Support (IS) or Income-based Job Seekers Allowance (IBJSA).
- Receive Income Related Employment Allowance (IREA).
- Have an entitlement to Child Tax Credit (CTC), provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit (WTC) and have an annual income (as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs) that does not exceed £16,190. (this figure changes on an annual basis).
- Receive support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.
- Receive the guarantee credit element of Pension Credit.

However, where a parent is entitled to 'Working Tax Credit Run On' during the four week period immediately after their employment ceases, or after they start to work less than 16 hours per week, their children are entitled to Free School Meals.

Parents should provide a copy of their Tax Credit decision notice to confirm this 4 week period of eligibility.

**You are not eligible if you are in one or more of the following categories:**

- Part time pupils (children at nursery) are not entitled to free school meals. To qualify children must be receiving education before and after the lunch period.
- Pupils whose parents receive other state benefits but not those mentioned above.
- Pupils whose parents receive Working Tax Credit.
- Pupils who are in foster care, if a child is fostered the Carer will be receiving an allowance which covers all costs for the child, including meals at home and school. Please note: applicants receiving any part of Working Tax Credit with their CTC will not qualify for free school meals. By law, no other category of support payment or combination of Tax Credits qualify for Free School Meals.

## How to apply

Northumberland County Council use the Electronic Checking System (ECS) to check benefit entitlement so you can apply by providing the required information either:-

- By telephone – call the Free School Meals Team at Northumberland County Council on 01670 533033
- Online – at [www.northumberland.gov.uk/fsm](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/fsm)
- By paper – application forms are also available from any of the Academy's campuses or The FSM Office, Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF. Forms can be returned to any of the Academy's campuses or direct to the FSM Office.

Paper forms can be returned to the Academy campus or the County Council FSM office. Benefit details for applications can be checked by us on receipt of the information although on some occasions the confirmation may not be found and you will be contacted with a request to provide your proof of benefit.

#### How long will the process take?

Applications are processed as quickly as possible however, at peak times forms are dealt with in strict date order therefore the timing for a response to an application depends on the volume of forms awaiting processing.

If applications are made by telephone it may be possible for the free meals to start with immediate effect. If the application is received before lunch the meals will be started from that day, after lunch will be started the following day. However, please inform the relevant campus(es) that you have applied using this route.

The Academy will be notified by NCC of your entitlement immediately by telephone or email. If applications are handed in to the school, and confirmation of benefit has been received the school can start the meals immediately.

Otherwise claims are started from the nearest Monday from the date an application is received at the FSM office or the date handed in at the Academy, providing the proof of benefit supplied is sufficient.

#### How often do I apply?

Claims for free school meals are reviewed annually and applications will be automatically extended if the County Council receive confirmation of benefit using their electronic system.

Any meals due to expire within the next 6 weeks will be electronically checked and extended for a further year if benefit results are correct.

If the benefit results come back as not found a reminder letter and application form will be sent out to you for completion. The completed form and a recent proof of benefit should be returned to either the FSM office or the Academy before the meals expire.

#### What if my circumstances change?

The Academy and the FSM office should be notified immediately of any changes:

- If you start work and your benefit changes/stops
- If you change address
- If your child changes school
- If you change your name

Failure to notify us of a change of circumstance may affect your child's entitlement to free school meals. If your child receives free meals when they are no longer eligible, you will be required to reimburse the Academy any monies owed.

If you have not informed us of a change of address or you do not renew your award, your entitlement will be cancelled. You will be responsible for the payment of any meals taken. This will not be refunded and meals will not be backdated, it is your responsibility to keep us informed.