

18 June 2024

Dear Principal,

RE: Free School Meals and Uniform/Physical Education Allowances for School Year 2024/25

I would like to provide an update on the upcoming 2024/25 application process for Free School Meals and School Uniform/Physical Education Clothing Allowances.

The online application process via EA Connect is now open.

We continue to seek your support to promote awareness of Free School Meals and Uniform Allowance, and to encourage all potential applicants to apply for the support available.

All parents/carers should, therefore, be encouraged to apply on [EA Connect](#) before **26 July** to ensure arrangements are in place for the new school year beginning in September 2024. Timely applications will also help staff and schools as we work towards the Census date of 11 October 2024.

Special Diet

In previous years, parents/carers whose child had a Statement of Special Educational Needs (Stage 3) and required a special diet and who did not qualify for Free School Meals under the standard financial eligibility criteria, were required to apply for Free School Meals via a paper application form.

The EA Free School Meals service also required medical evidence from a medical professional that a special diet was required.

We have listened to the feedback received from parents/carers, medical professionals and schools in relation to the difficulties around this process and for the 2024/25 school year, parents/carers can now apply for support online via the EA Connect portal where they will be directed to the relevant online application for Free School Meals under the Special Diet criterion.

This applies to both new and existing claimants. Evidence of a medically required special diet provided by a medical professional is no longer required, however, parents/carers are required to make a declaration to confirm under which medical requirement a special diet is required.

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Education Authority

40 Academy Street, Belfast, BT1 2NQ

T: +44 (0)28 9056 4000 **F:** +44 (0)28 9033 1714 **W:** www.eani.org.uk

Pupils Eligible for Free School Meals

The first full list of pupils eligible for free school meals will be sent to you at the end of August 2024 via AnyComms (or by post/email to schools and colleges who do not use SIMS).

Weekly updates will be sent each Friday and further full lists sent on the following Monday. Pupils who are eligible for Free School Meals under the Special Diet criterion will be noted on the lists.

Please check the lists and inform the EA Free School Meals and Uniform Section immediately if a pupil/student has not enrolled for the 2024/25 school year or is no longer in attendance during the year so that their records can be updated.

Free School Meals / Uniform Allowance Helpdesk

The Free Schools Meals and Uniform Allowance Helpdesk is available to assist **parents and guardians** who may have any queries. The Helpdesk operates Monday – Friday from 9am to 4pm and can be contacted via email: mealsanduniform@eani.org.uk.

As previously advised, schools should use mealsanduniformschools@eani.org.uk which is the email for **schools' staff only**. This will ensure that your enquiry is given priority.

The telephone number for all enquiries is 028 9041 8044. Please be aware that this number receives a high volume of queries during peak periods.

Further information including eligibility criteria for the 2024/25 school year and a list of Frequently Asked Questions to assist with any parental queries can be accessed by visiting our [website](#).

Thank you for your continued assistance in relation to the provision of free school meals and uniform grants to eligible children.

Chris Scott
Head of Admissions and Financial Support

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