

## **Government Guidance Free School Meals 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020**

Children eligible for free school meals will benefit from a national voucher scheme allowing them to continue to access meals whilst they stay at home.

Schools can now provide every eligible child with a weekly shopping voucher worth £15 to spend at supermarkets while schools are closed due to coronavirus.

Schools can continue to provide meals for collection or delivery themselves, but where this is not possible, the scheme will allow schools to provide vouchers to families electronically, or as a gift card for those without internet access.

The vouchers can be spent on food at a range of shops including Sainsbury's, Tesco, Asda, Morrisons, Waitrose and M&S, with the Department working to get more shops to join the scheme as soon as possible.

*Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:*

I recognise that the unprecedented action this Government is taking to protect the country from coronavirus, including closing schools, is dramatically affecting the lives of many families.

I want to thank schools for the support they are continuing to provide to families during such uncertain times.

No child should go hungry as a result of the measures introduced to keep people at home, protect the NHS and save lives. That's why we are launching this scheme to make sure children who usually benefit from free school meals still have access to healthy and nutritious meals while they are not attending school.

Parents will receive the voucher through their child's school, which can then be redeemed online via a code, or sent to their house as a gift card and used at supermarkets across the country.

This delivers on the Government's commitment to provide ongoing support for the 1.3 million children that would receive benefits-related free school meals at their school.

*Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT), said:*

This is welcome news for schools and families. This new system fills in one of the remaining gaps in the complex jigsaw puzzle of provision that has arisen from the Covid-19 crisis. There may be some kinks to work out of the scheme, especially as it has been developed at pace, but at least there is some certainty available now.

The government has done the right thing by ensuring that vouchers can be used at a range of different shops, making it more practical for families to use the vouchers. Many schools had already developed their own schemes and local solutions, so it is good to see that they will be able to continue these if they're working well or adopt the new scheme if they feel that would be better. We'll be working with the government to make sure this system works as effectively as everyone hopes it will.

The total value of vouchers available per eligible child per week exceeds the rate paid to schools for free school meals, recognising that families will not be buying food in bulk and may therefore incur higher costs.

The Department for Education has also published new [guidance](#) on free school meals to help schools and parents prepare.

*Mike Coupe, Sainsbury's Chief Executive, said:*

Over the last few weeks we have been working closely with the government to get food to those who need it the most. We have introduced measures to support NHS workers, elderly and vulnerable customers and keep our customers and colleagues safe. We are proud to be involved in the government's brilliant initiative, to help provide meals to school children as part of our ongoing commitment to feed the nation.

### **Sending eCodes to families**

You can send a redemption eCode from the Edenred system directly to the parent or carers of the pupil(s) eligible for free school meals. They will receive instructions on how to use this eCode to create an eGift card, which the family should receive within 3 hours. You should only consider this approach if the family receiving the support has a working email account which they can access.

### **Supermarkets available**

Through Edenred, you can currently access eGift cards for the following supermarkets:

- Morrisons
- Tesco
- Sainsbury's
- Asda
- Waitrose
- M&S

We recognise that it may not be convenient or possible for some families to visit one of these supermarkets, and we are working to see if additional supermarkets can be added to this list. If families are unable to visit one of these supermarkets, we encourage your school to continue with a local solution to supporting pupils eligible for free school meals.

### **Redeeming the vouchers**

Once families have received their voucher, they will be able to redeem them in-store at the selected retailer by either:

- presenting the voucher on a smartphone or tablet
- presenting a paper copy of the voucher

Families are free to select the most appropriate food and drink for their child. When selecting products, we encourage families to consider health and nutrition. The [School Food Standards](#) may act as a useful guide for families.

The vouchers should not be redeemed for any age-restricted items, such as alcohol, cigarettes or lottery tickets.

There are a number of online resources available to support families in preparing healthy and nutritious food, including on the [NHS Eat Well website](#).

### **Q&A**

#### **Will every child at home due to school closures receive support?**

This support focuses on those eligible for benefits-related free school meals.

**Will pupils who become newly eligible for free school meals be supported?**

Yes. Schools and local authorities should continue to accept free school meal applications. Parents should make contact with the school or local authority, who will verify eligibility and award free school meals.

**What is the eligibility criteria for free school meals?**

The eligibility criteria for free school meals can be found on [apply for free school meals](#).

**What about infants that receive a free meal under universal infant free school meals?**

It is right that schools concentrate their effort and resources on those who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals at this time. There is no requirement to continue to provide universal infant free school meals to pupils in reception, year 1, or year 2 who are unable to attend school. Children in those year groups who are eligible for benefits-related free school meals will be supported.

**What about children who are attending school?**

In the [maintaining educational provision](#) guidance, we ask schools to continue to provide care for a limited number of children, including those who are vulnerable and children whose parents are critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) response and cannot be safely cared for at home.

Where schools are open for children of critical workers and vulnerable children, schools should continue to provide meals for pupils in attendance. Meals should be free of charge for pupils who would normally receive free school meals, and schools have discretion as to whether they charge other pupils.

**Our school is open over the Easter holidays and our food supplier is able to continue to provide meals for children eligible for free school meals who are not in school. Is that allowed?**

Yes. It is for schools to decide locally how their arrangements for free school meals will operate.

Whilst the vouchers are for term time only, if there is a local arrangement to supply food that the school and the supplier intend to continue over this period then that can be agreed and managed locally. This would need to be manageable within schools' existing resources, as there will not be additional funding available for this purpose.

**How will children who usually attend a breakfast club be supported?**

We are working to consider options to support children who currently receive a free breakfast through DfE's contract with Family Action and Magic Breakfast. Family Action with Magic Breakfast will liaise directly with the schools involved in the programme.