

## Free School Meals

The COVID-19 pandemic is identifying new vulnerable families within Derbyshire. Many have seen their personal circumstances change dramatically, have lost income and may be finding it difficult to claim benefits and seek assistance.

We are concerned that there may be some families now be eligible for Free School Meals but unsure how to apply or who don't know if they are entitled. It is important to remember that families who become eligible now will be protected and continue to receive free meals until March 2022 under a new ruling following the rollout of Universal Credit. **Taking up this allowance can save a family budget over £400 for each child every year.**

Schools also benefit, as pupils eligible for free schools meals **attract Pupil Premium funding of around £1,000+ per pupil.** This funding is guaranteed for 6 years, whether or not the pupil continues to be eligible for free schools meals during that time.

During school closures many schools are providing alternative schemes such as packed lunches, supermarket vouchers or hampers which new vulnerable families may be entitled to access.

## Free school meal entitlement

All children aged 3 to 18 at Derbyshire nurseries or schools can get a free meal if they qualify.

Qualifying criteria:

- Universal Credit, provided they have an annual net earned income not exceeding £7,400 (£616.67 per month)
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- support under Part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190) as assessed by HMRC
- Working Tax Credit run-on (paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)

Please contact the friendly Free School Meals team at [checking@derbyshire.gov.uk](mailto:checking@derbyshire.gov.uk) or parents can ring the team on 01629 536400/01629 535743, where they will receive instructions on who can be contacted on that given day.

Families can also apply on line at <https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your-child-at-school/meals/school-meals/free-school-meals.aspx>

Access to free schools meals provides many benefits to eligible families during these difficult times, including reducing the financial burden of providing regular meals. Children receive the benefit of a consistent source of nutrition, improving concentration and the ability to learn, as well as encouraging them to eat a variety of foods and adopt healthy eating habits.