

MAYOR OF LONDON

Frequently Asked Questions – Mayor’s Universal Free School Meals Programme

1. What is the Mayor's expansion of universal free school meals?

Currently the Government provides universal free school meals to all infants and to some older children that meet a strict eligibility criteria. The Mayor’s funding aims to expand free school meals so that every child in a state London primary school will have the offer of a free lunch.

2. Why is the Mayor providing universal free school meals?

Families across London are desperately struggling with the spiralling cost of living and are in urgent need of more support. City Hall has repeatedly called for the Government to provide universal free school meals to help already stretched families, but they have simply failed to act. That’s why, in light of the growing pressures on families, the Mayor is providing this emergency one-year funding.

3. Who is eligible for these universal free school meals?

It is proposed that the Mayor’s programme is consistent with the Government’s existing funding of Universal Infant Free School Meals and will cover pupils in state-funded primary schools, special schools and pupil referral units, including faith schools.

4. How do I get a free school meal for my child? Do I need to register?

Your primary school children will automatically be enrolled to receive a free school meal for the 2023/24 academic year. Your school will be in touch to ask for the information they need to plan the number of meals they need to prepare.

It’s really important that you still complete your school or borough’s registration form in case your child’s is eligible for extra funding for their school from the Government, worth £1,300 per year.

Those parents whose children already qualify for free school meals under the Government’s existing offer must also continue to apply for FSM as before.

5. What are the benefits of providing universal free school meals?

Extending free school meals to children who do not currently receive it, potentially saves families up to £440 across the year. Providing universal free school meals also removes the stigma associated with means-testing and helps improve take-up overall.

Food insecurity affects children’s wellbeing, with children from families experiencing food insecurity more likely to suffer poor mental health. Without a healthy school lunch, children struggle to concentrate and learn in the classroom. A free school meal will help all children to reach their potential.

6. What types of meals are provided under this initiative?

Like with other free school meals, schools are expected to provide nutritious and balanced meals to children. The meals should meet the Government's food standards, which ensure that children receive a variety of food groups and essential nutrients.

7. What about children with specific dietary requirements?

Please inform the school if your child has any specific dietary requirements, so appropriate arrangements can be made for their meals.

8. I would prefer to send a packed lunch for my child. Can I still do this?

We hope you will take up the offer of support to your family but you will still be able to send a packed lunch for your child if you would prefer. Policies on packed lunches are set by individual schools.

9. Where can I find more information?

The Mayor has set up an online families hub with all of the information you need: <https://www.london.gov.uk/free-school-meals> You can also directly contact your school for information.