

## **AUTOMATIC AWARD FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS INFORMATION SHEET – AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2023**

- You have received a letter because we know that you are a parent/carer with a child/children who may be at nursery or school. You do not appear to have a current Free School Meal award for your dependents and we think you may be entitled to one. We run a data matching exercise using pupil records and housing benefit data each year to identify the children who might be entitled to a free school meal.
- The data matching exercise does involve the processing of your personal data, but we do this because the Council has a duty to provide free school meals to eligible children, and to help families access the support that they are entitled to.
- We will use your surname, National Insurance number and your date of birth so that we can check if you qualify for free school meals. When we use your information, the government's electronic free school meals checking service gives us a simple reply – **YES or NO**. This is how we check to see if you qualify for free school meals.
- We do not see any other information about you or your family when we use the checking service and we are also not allowed to ask anything else from the Department of Work and Pensions, or HMRC. The information is kept securely and we have to follow very strict procedures about how we look after your personal information under UK data protection law.
- We will be letting schools know where there are children at school who qualify for free school meals, just as we do now for families that have already made an application for free school meals. If you qualify for free school meals they can order a meal for your child straightaway if you want them to have one. Schools can then include the number of children who qualify for free schools meals in their Census Day information which they do in October.

- If schools do this, they receive the right level of funding from the government to support children who qualify for free school meals. This funding is called Pupil Premium. For each child in primary school this means £1,385 and for each child in secondary school it is £985. We want to make sure that we do everything we can to help schools receive the funding they are entitled to.
- **Please note:** If your child/ren attends one of the Oasis Academy schools - Fir Vale, Watermead or Don Valley you will need to contact the school directly to apply for free school meals as they manage their own free school meals application process.
- Free school meals are only given to children attending schools (or school nurseries) over lunch time. If your child is 3 or 4 years old, accessing Free Early Learning at a private nursery or childminder, and you meet the criteria for free school meals, their provider will receive Early Years Pupil Premium. We will automatically recheck your child's entitlement to Free School Meals when they start school.
- Schools and Early Years providers use the Pupil Premium money to support the most disadvantaged children in school by helping them in lots of different ways. For example some schools choose to offer help with practical things – reducing the cost of uniforms, books or school trips, or they may set up a free breakfast club so children can have breakfast before schools starts, making sure all children are in class on time and ready to learn. They may invest in extra resources to support teaching and learning, or employ skilled and trained professionals to work with individual children like speech therapists or Learning Mentors. The money must be used to help and support children which is why it's so important.
- Your child does not have to have a school meal, although one will be available free of charge at any time until your circumstances change and you no longer qualify. But the value of the meal is worth around £400 per year to you, and you could put the money you spend on a packed lunch towards other things. Also, children often will eat meals at school if they see their friends having

them. They often try different foods at school rather than at home.

- You don't have to do anything now – we will organise everything by sending schools a secure and confidential list of children who qualify for free school meals.
- If you don't want us to use your Housing Benefit information that's no problem – we won't use it if you don't want us to. But schools are there to help you as a family and will not receive the right Pupil Premium funding unless and until free school meals have been awarded. Schools cannot use your information for anything else either just like the council and they are bound by the same rules as we are. They also do not single out any child as having free meals –your child would not be treated any differently to any other child in school.
- If you do not want us to carry out the data matching exercise to check your child's eligibility, or to enrol your child onto the free school meals scheme, you have the right to object at any time. However, if you do not contact us within three weeks of the date of this letter, we may have already begun the process of checking eligibility. You can email your objection to **the School Food Service** via: [schoolfood@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:schoolfood@sheffield.gov.uk). Or contact us by telephone on (0114) 2734567, option 4, option 3. We will make a note of what you have told us, and we won't carry out any further processing of your personal data during this year's data matching exercise.

If you wish to check your own entitlement for free school meals at any time you can use the following link to the School Meals page of the Sheffield City Council website: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/schools-childcare/school-meals>