



## COVID-19: Free school meals guidance for schools.

To: England

For info: Contacts from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

### Key Issues

In response to the government announcement regarding the closure of schools in England until further notice. Guidance for schools regarding free school meal provision has been issued.

#### 1. Introduction

Following the government announcement on the 18 March 2020 to close schools for the foreseeable future in response to COVID-19, they have published guidance for schools regarding free school meal provision.

This briefing outlines a summary of the guidance. A copy of the full guidance can be found via the following link:-

[COVID-19 -Free School Meal Guidance](#)

#### 2. Support for pupils who have to stay at home

The government states that under normal circumstances, schools are not expected to provide free school meals to disadvantaged children who are not attending due to illness or if the school is closed. However, in the current situation schools will be expected to continue to provide support to these pupils if:

- they/or a family member are affected by coronavirus (COVID-19)
- your school closes temporarily

As the approach to how the school meals are delivered differs the steps that schools take to support pupils affected by coronavirus (COVID-19) might be different depending on the individual circumstances of the school.

### **3. Contact your catering team**

Schools are recommended to speak to their catering team (in house), or school catering provider to see if they can prepare meals or food parcels that could be delivered to, or collected by families.

If the school uses a local authority catering service, they are being asked to check if they have a scheme for providing meals or food parcels to vulnerable groups affected by coronavirus (COVID-19).

If the school uses a private catering provider, the government are recommended that they are contacted to see what alternative arrangements are available.

### **4. Other options if you cannot provide meals or food parcels**

In the event a school is unable to use their current provider to continue offering free school meals, consideration should be given to using the following:

- using other local initiatives – this could be a local school acting as a community hub, or a local charity
- providing families with supermarket vouchers

### **5. Supermarket vouchers**

The government are currently developing a national approach to providing support through supermarket and shop vouchers and advise that they will provide further details shortly.

If the school is closed and the school catering team cannot provide meals or food parcels, schools are being asked to offer families of pupils eligible for free school meals an alternative such as supermarket vouchers.

Schools can order supermarket and shop vouchers directly from a number of retailers – usually through their corporate division. The government recommend sourcing vouchers for supermarkets or shops in the local area. Where possible they should be restricted for use against age-related products.

The choice of vouchers includes:

- e-vouchers (where available) - which you can email directly to parents
- gift cards - which may be more suitable if parents do not have access to the internet

Pupils eligibility should be checked and if there should be confirmation that they are currently in receipt of free school meals, and vouchers should be made available to the parent or the adult with caring responsibility for that child.

## **Additional costs**

Further guidance will be published shortly on how schools will be compensated for the costs incurred in providing free school meals or vouchers to pupils affected by coronavirus (COVID-19).

## **APSE COMMENT**

APSE has set up a COVID-19 Information Hub to deal with frontline service issues as they arise; ensuring greater resilience and learning between each other during this difficult time.

Details can be accessed via the following link:-

[COVID -19- APSE information hub](#)

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