

Service Specification for Academy Schools **WES Free School Meals Eligibility Checking Service**

The basics – Service Description

We provide a complete solution for all aspects of the Free School Meals application process. Our systems integrate with real-time eligibility data, and our experienced team of staff ensure it is easy for parents to apply.

If schools chose not to subscribe to our service, they will be removed from our database and responsible for processing their own free school meals applications and dealing with queries from parents/carers. A list of subscribed schools will be published on the WCC website.

What's included? – Service Deliverables

Parents with children in Reception to Year 11 can apply for Free School Meals at any time using the Warwickshire County Council website (subject to availability). Telephone applications can be made via Warwickshire's Family Information Service by anyone, but we specifically request applications for pre-school aged children are made via phone/email. Normal hours are 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. (These may be reduced at certain times. e.g. Christmas / New Year)

Academies can access real-time data regarding applications and are immediately notified of a successful application, as long as attendance data for the child has been accurately reported to WCC education services.

All aspects of end of year / on-going renewal processes are managed, so we will provide schools with an updated list of pupils at the start of each academic year (subject to correct attendance data being available). **New for 2026-27 onwards:** With transitional protections ending after the 2025–26 academic year, the Department for Education requires all currently eligible pupils to have their free school meal eligibility re-checked for the start of 2026–27, using the new criteria ([Free school meals](#)). This eligibility check will then be repeated annually. To meet the remit of the national policy requirements, including annual checks and anticipated increased uptake, charges have increased from 2025-26 prices. Academies will be provided with guidance on changes in legislation relevant to Free School Meals.

You will have access to the Free School Meals administrative service for advice and guidance by e-mail or telephone during the hours 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday.

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Who does what? – Service Responsibilities

We will:

- Check online and telephone applications against live data using the Department for Education's Eligibility Checking Engine (subject to availability). **Please note:** we will only be dealing with applications for children in applicable Early Years settings, up until the end of their statutory education. Applications for children in post 16/ further education will be the responsibility of the education setting
- Liaise with the applicant to manually check evidence where eligibility cannot be verified automatically
- Give schools access to our School Access Module Free School Meals system (SAM) which allows schools to view all details of applications submitted, the status of each application, and to print / download lists showing eligible students. The system also automatically notifies schools and parents (where the correct email address has been supplied) when someone becomes newly eligible
- Applicants submitting a paper-based application will be sent a decision regarding eligibility within five working days of the application being received
- Carry out yearly eligibility re-checks of all eligible pupils at your school in line with new DfE guidance, published May 2026 ([Free school meals](#))

Who does what? – Customer Responsibilities

The Academy will:

- Notify Warwickshire County Council of any relevant information relating to Free School Meals (for example a change of school for an entitled child). Changes relating to a child's provision will need to be reported to pupiltracking@warwickshire.gov.uk to ensure this information is updated on SAM and their FSM data kept up to date
- Inform the service of which email address should be used for eligibility notifications and access to the School Access Module FSM database, and ensure you update us of this if it changes
- Provide details of members of staff who will need access to the Free School Meals Database
- Take any steps they consider reasonable to confirm eligibility with parents and be proactive in contacting us about children who they believe may be eligible
- Maximise understanding that parent/carers of children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 do not need to apply for their Universal Infant Free School Meals, as these should be automatically granted, but they can also separately apply for benefits-related FSM to get access to other things, such as the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (where applicable)
- Process applications for any Post 16 children in attendance at their school

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How to buy more

Not applicable – All aspects of the process are covered by the service.

If something goes wrong

If you have any questions or queries about our service delivery please contact the Family Information Service team on 01926 742274 or freemeals@warwickshire.gov.uk between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday. We aim to respond to 100% of queries within 5 days.

If you don't get a response to the above within 5 days or have an issue about the service to escalate, please contact Becca Bunker who will review and respond within 5 working days.

If you are not satisfied with the response or resolution provided by the service, you can raise a Stage One Complaint to WES Customer Care using the WES Complaints Process document that can be found on the WES website. WES Customer Care will respond to you within 8 working days.

Service Levels

We will monitor our performance against the following KPIs on a quarterly basis. These are based on current arrangements but may need to be reviewed from time to time. Performance reports will be scrutinised by the Council's Commercial Board who will set reparative expectations for any service levels that fall below published standards.

If, as a customer, you believe our service level has fallen below these levels, please contact us through the process outlined in the 'if something goes wrong' section above.

Indicator	Description	Measure
Customer Care	We will respond to any queries about service delivery within 5 days.	100% of queries will be responded to within 5 days.
Notification	Eligible applicants receive confirmation of eligibility within 5 working days.	100% of successful applicants receive confirmation within 5 working days (subject to system functionality)