APPLICATION FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

Who is eligible?

Children registered as pupils at a school and whose parents receive the following support payments are entitled to receive free school meals:

- Income Support;
- Income Based Jobseekers Allowance;
- An Income-related Employment and Support Allowance;
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999;
- Child Tax Credit, provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual income (as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs - HMRC) that as of 6 April 2010 does not exceed £16,190; or
- The guaranteed element of State Pension Credit.

(Note that the income threshold for free school meals eligibility for parents receiving Child Tax Credit is revised annually, and increased, as of 6 April 2010, from £16,040 to £16,190.

Additional notes:

- In all cases, please note that a request for free school meals must be made in order for a child to become eligible. The cost of school meals cannot be claimed for any period prior to a claim for free school meals being made.
- Children in early years or reception classes who are below compulsory school age must be attending both before and after the lunch period, in order to be eligible to receive free school meals.
- Working Families/Working Tax Credit includes an allowance for meals, which is why families receiving this benefit are not normally entitled to claim free school meals (with the exception below -
- Working tax credit usually continues to be paid for the first four weeks of unemployment before transferring to other benefits, eg jobseeker's allowance. Families may still be entitled to claim free school meals in this four week period, despite receiving working tax credit.
- Children in the care of the Local Authority, e.g. foster children, or of a voluntary organisation, cannot be considered for free school meals
- The authority does not grant free school meals to children at independent – private – schools.
- Parents whose children attend schools outside of Wokingham Borough should contact their child's school, or the local authority which maintains the school, with regards to free school meals, as their local arrangements for processing claims may be different.

How to make a claim:

The Council has introduced a new easier way for parents to apply for free school meals. Previously, you would have to produce evidence of your benefit support payments and income levels and give this to the school office every term. Now, we are able to confirm whether you are eligible for free school meals electronically, using a secure government on-line system.

You will only need to complete one form once. The benefits are:

- ✓ Eligibility will be checked automatically for you each term
- ✓ You will no longer have to produce evidence of any benefits or of your income to the school
- ✓ The school will receive only a yes/no answer from the online checking system– this means they will not have access to any of your personal income or benefits information

How do I apply?

1. Complete an application form in full and give this to the office at your child's school.

2. An on-line check will be made using the information provided on the form. The details provided on the form will be exchanged via secure websites. The system will provide a yes/no confirmation of your eligibility.

3 Your child's school will inform you of the result and the effective date of your eligibility.

4 If for any reason it is not possible to make an on-line check, you will need to provide documentary evidence of eligibility to the school. If your circumstances have recently changed, and you believe the online check result may be wrong, you may need to provide documentary evidence of eligibility to the school. The school will confirm eligibility, based on an assessment of the evidence provided, and the effective date. Details of appropriate documents to provide as evidence are given overleaf.

5 Your entitlement commences on the date when an application is made to the school. Claims to be reimbursed for any school meals previously paid for during your period of benefit entitlement will not normally be met.

6 You must inform the school immediately of any change in your benefit entitlement. The school will use online checking on a regular basis to confirm that families are still entitled to free school meals. (Parents will not need to be asked to complete new forms.) If you have not already told the school yourself, but the online check advises that you are no longer eligible, the school will inform you and confirm the effective date.

What if I disagree with the decision?

If your circumstances have recently changed, the information available through the on-line system may not be up to date. In these cases, you may need to provide documentary evidence of your eligibility to the school.

For example, if you have just become unemployed you may still receive working tax credit (normally for the first four weeks of unemployment). In these circumstances the on-line system will not recognise that you are eligible for free school meals, and you will need to provide documentary evidence to the school.

In all other cases, where your circumstances have not recently changed, you will need to contact Job Centre Plus or your benefits agency if you feel the result of the online check is incorrect. The online system checks against the records held by these agencies, but the school is not informed of the reason why your claim is accepted or rejected.

The school can only provide free meals either from the on-line check, or on receipt of appropriate documentary evidence (see overleaf).

Data Protection:

Information contained on the application form is personal data and will be held in a computer; the information held is subject to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Recommended Documentary Evidence (in cases where this is required). Documentary evidence is not required where the online checking system is being used to confirm eligibility**.**

Income Support or Income Based Jobseeker Allowance	Application form stamped and signed by benefits agency/job centre confirming eligibility for receipt of allowance. Recent letter **or** bank statement confirming receipt of allowance. Bank statement must record payment as 'DWP I/S'	www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk
Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999	National Asylum Support Service (NASS) documentation	www.asylumsupport.info/nass.htm
Child Tax Credit (provided not entitled to Working Tax credit, and annual income does not exceed stated limit)	Tax Credit Award Notice (TC 602 Final Award Notice or TC603R Auto-renewal Notice), confirming entitlement to child tax credit (but not working tax credit) and income assessed as below stated limit.	www.hmrc.gov.uk
Guaranteed element of State Pension Credit	Pensions Credit Award Credit Notice (M1000 Award Notice), must clearly state the guarantee element.	www.thepensionservice.gov.uk

Documentary evidence - additional notes

Any form or letter supplied as evidence must be the most recent available **and** in any case less than one year old.

Any form or letter supplied as evidence must show current name and address.

Evidence of Asylum seeker status may be requested (home office documentation, port of entry or home office reference number, **or** National Asylum Support Service documentation and reference (NASS number).

Evidence may be requested that the person claiming eligibility has parental responsibility or is the legal carer of the child on whose behalf free school meals are being claimed.

If you have any queries, please contact the school in the first instance,
or your benefits agency or Job Centre Plus.