

Questions and Answers for Head Teachers - January 2014

Universal Infant Free School Meals

1. What exactly has the Government announced on universal free school meals?

The Coalition has announced that, from September 2014, all state funded infant school children (i.e. those in reception, year 1 and year 2) will receive a free school lunch.

The School Food Plan (www.schoolfoodplan.com) presented evidence that universal free school meals leads to positive improvements in health, attainment and social cohesion, and help families with the cost of living.

2. How much funding is available?

A billion pounds of new money has been allocated by the Department for Education (DfE) over the next two years to fund this policy.

In addition, the DfE is making £150 million of capital funding available for schools to build or upgrade new kitchens, and to increase dining capacity where it is needed.

(see <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/funding-allocations> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/capital-allocations-for-infant-free-school-meals>).

David Laws, the Schools Minister, will be writing to Local Authorities shortly with details of how this money should be allocated. Importantly, the government fully intends universal infant free school meals to be a permanent policy change.

3. How will the funding work and is it ring fenced? How does it impact current free school meal entitlement?

The Department for Education is finalising the revenue funding formula and will soon publish clear information on how the funding will work. Ministers are writing to all Head Teachers. The funding arrangements for those pupils currently receiving free school meals will not change. This money will continue to be distributed through your local authority as part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

The government has recently published some research on the numbers of children not currently claiming for free school meals. This research can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupils-not-claiming-free-school-meals-2013>



4. I am concerned this policy will affect my pupil premium – what should I do?

In the five Local Authorities that have already implemented universal free school meals, free school meal registration is now higher than before. Pupil Premium has not been adversely affected, though it did sometimes take a few weeks to get right. This was because the Local Authorities worked with schools to introduce a simple but compulsory registration system for all school meals.

In other words, the form had to be filled in by all parents to access school meals, whether the meal was to be provided free or not. This registration process included asking for relevant information on free school meal eligibility. We will be publishing more guidance and advice on how schools and local authorities should implement this shortly.

5. What am I supposed to say to parents?

The universal free school meal pilots in Durham and Newham showed that parents and carers of infant children make the decision whether to take up their entitlement to a school meal. It is important to engage with your pupils' parents as soon as possible. You may want to do this through your parent governors, perhaps appointing one of them to oversee the policy implementation.

The Pilots also showed that engaging parents (as well as of course your pupils) helps improve the quality of the meals, the overall meal experience and therefore take-up. Good marketing and promotion is key. However, be aware that UFSM does not necessarily lead to 100% take up of meals. Because of food allergies, absences, religious beliefs and those who will insist on carrying on with packed lunches, take up usually hovers between 85% and 90%.

6. Our school doesn't currently have a kitchen - what can I do?

We know that a small number of schools have no school kitchen and rely on transported, or brought in, meals, or don't offer a school lunch service at all. However, launching a new school meal service by September is entirely possible with the right help.

The School Food Plan will be publishing a Toolkit for implementing infant universal free school meals, which will be available mid February. We are also putting together a rich, easy to access on-line archive of 'What Works Well'. You can read more about this in Chapter Five of the School Food Plan. (www.schoolfoodplan.com)

You need to consider what school meal delivery option will work best for you. If your school doesn't currently have a kitchen but is going to be serving more than 100 meals per day (across the whole school - KS1 and KS2), then the economies of scale this produces



should enable you to prepare and cook your lunch on site, rather than relying on a transported or brought in service. The School Food Plan has established a *Small Schools Taskforce* to support small schools – we recognise many will value this extra support.

You should talk with your catering provider and local authority as soon as possible. Caterers may have ideas of how you can achieve this and may be a big help

Finally, the Department for Education is also in the process of commissioning a number of expert organisations to provide direct help and support to schools over the next year – they have made nearly £20m available to do this.

7. Our kitchen won't be able to cope with the increase in demand. What do I do?

Think about your kitchen in terms of both the staff and the equipment you will need.

Once you have a clear understanding of your potential take-up numbers (having spoken with your catering team, pupils and parents), you should undertake an equipment audit. Do this with your current caterer or speak with your local authority to help you. You will need to think what changes to cooking, serving and storage space are needed. Does the kitchen have enough power supply?

In Islington they broke down their kitchen needs into four headings:

1. Kitchen refurbishments and extensions (actual building work needed)
2. Large kitchen equipment - to cover storage (fridges) and cooking (combi-ovens) prep machines etc.
3. Additional serving trolleys and serveries – hot and cold cabinets, hot plates etc.
4. Small kitchen items including light equipment, cutlery, plates, bowls etc. (could you use this policy as an opportunity to replace flight trays with proper crockery, for example?)

The capital funding, available through your Local Authority, should be able to fund what you will need. In some cases this could be a whole new kitchen. (Entire kitchen pods which can cook 150 meals a day can be hired for as little as £1,000 a month or can be bought outright from £50,000).

You will then need to work with your caterer to consider any increase in staffing levels you might need. Kitchen staff will possibly have to work more hours, or become more efficient. School catering teams often feel that they are working at full capacity, when in fact they might be working within a current set-up that slows them down. Use this opportunity to consider what training you provide, how the kitchen routine is set up and what menus you put in place.



In the Pilot areas, new kitchen staff were recruited on temporary contracts (or agency staff were used) until the right staffing levels became clear (this might take time to get right).

Kitchen staff and lunchtime supervisory staff will appreciate your leadership and support over the coming months, so involve them in planning as much as possible. Also consider reducing menu choice.

8. Where will all these children eat? Our dining room isn't big enough.

If your dining room is not currently big enough to sit all your pupils in one sitting from September, you will need to introduce staggered mealtimes. We know of some schools with high take up that have four separate settings over a two-hour lunchtime. School timetables have to be changed but it can work well. And you will need to make sure that you address any queuing issues. This may well require radical, creative and flexible thinking!

You may also want to use infant universal free school meals as an opportunity to give your dining room (and indeed the whole dining experience) a makeover. Do you treat your dining room as the heart and hub of the school? For many Primaries, the dining room is also the School Hall, and so is already a hub for the school. Engage your pupils to make it a space where they want to be at lunchtime. Is it an attractive environment and does the dining experience fit into their social life?

We will make sure that we include many examples in our toolkit and in our What Works Well website where schools have done amazing things to their dining rooms and dining experiences.

In certain cases schools may already be at the limit of staggered lunchtimes. In this case, you will need to speak with your Local Authority about capital funding opportunities.

9. Who's going to be responsible for covering the costs of the extra dining room supervisors, and the extra cleaning?

You already know how important your dining room supervisors are in creating a good lunchtime experience. You may want to take this opportunity to encourage members of the teaching staff also sit with pupils on a rota basis – this has a powerful role model effect, especially for younger pupils. In the schools with the best food culture, teachers regularly eat with children.

In terms of covering the extra costs, there is no automatic answer as there are many different contract arrangements in place between schools and their catering teams. Often



the catering contract (the agreed price per meal) will cover paying for serving, clearing and midday supervisors.

10. Will children still be able to bring a packed lunch if they wish to?

As a Head Teacher, you have the power to decide whether you want to allow pupils to bring in a packed lunch instead of taking up their free school meal. We have seen schools where the Head Teacher has successfully banned packed lunches across the whole school. This clearly takes a strong commitment and excellent communication with pupils and parents.

You may want to introduce a healthy packed lunch policy for those Key Stage 2 pupils who want to continue with packed lunches. (However, we believe that take-up rates should increase for your KS2 pupils too, especially with the delivery of the other actions in the School Food Plan.) We have been working with the Department of Health's Change 4 Life to produce great resources for schools (<http://www.nhs.uk/change4life/Pages/schools-partners.aspx>) You can also read about how Ashton Vale Primary School in Bristol resolved to make their packed lunches as healthy as possible, by going to <http://ashtonvaleprimary.weebly.com/healthy-lunchboxes.html>

11. Can we just provide a free cold meal?

We know that some schools have asked us whether they can provide a sandwich and a yoghurt instead of a hot meal. This would be a bad idea for several reasons. First, it would be much less popular with pupils. Take-up would be lower, meaning that you would get neither the economic benefits of scale, nor the cultural benefits of bringing everyone together in a busy, vibrant dining area.

Second, it would be nowhere near as nutritious as a cooked meal. In September, a revised set of standards for school food will be rolled out across England. It will be next to impossible for schools to meet these standards by providing a cold packed lunch every day.

12. Won't the quality of the food suffer?

Parents in Islington and Durham reported that their children's meals were healthy and high quality. Because of the schools' good communication, parents also knew that the free school meal was healthier than a packed lunch. (In fact, only 1% of brought in packed lunches meet the nutritional quality set through the School Food Standards).

Interestingly, parents also reported that their children were also willing to try new foods.



But you should talk to your catering team about quality issues – not only about good sourcing and procurement but, importantly, about taste and presentation. You should consider signing up to a quality mark such as the Food for Life Catering Mark.

One of the actions in the School Food Plan is to introduce revised School Food Standards in all state-funded schools, including Academies and Free Schools. This will make it easier for school cooks and caterers to create interesting and nutritionally balanced meals. The standards, which will be written in plain English, will be accompanied by useful guidance and examples of menus that have been given the thumbs up by cooks, caterers and of course pupils!

If you are concerned, you should check your current catering contract to make sure there are clauses about food standards and quality.

13. Why has this now become part of the Head Teacher's role? / I contract my catering so I don't have to worry about school meals

The only person with the power to orchestrate and deliver this policy successfully is the Head Teacher. You will benefit from the support of your catering staff, governors and leadership team, but if you are not fully behind changing the food culture in your school, it won't happen.

This does not mean you should do all the work. Get a good support team, ideally including an energetic business manager or deputy head, a talented and adaptable cook, and at least one determined parent or governor. Work closely with your Local Authority and your caterer if you have one.

The successful implementation of the universal free school meals policy has been proven to raise school attainment levels, and improve behaviour and culture in schools. Children eat better. But without your will and enthusiasm, your school will find it impossible to reap the full benefits.

14. How do we get started?

You need a plan. Bring together a project team including your business manager, a governor, your school cook, local authority, caterer (if you have one) and a parent. Communicate often, and well, with your parents and don't forget to consult your pupils – their views are usually illuminating. Read and digest the School Food Plan, including the Head Teacher's checklist.

In March, we will be publishing the list of those expert organisations that the Department for Education will be funding to work directly with schools.



Above all, take comfort and confidence that it can be done, because it has been done. Help and support is out there. Your support, enthusiasm and engagement is key.

15. Where can I get help?

The Department for Education will shortly announce details of expert organisations who will be awarded funding to work with schools over the next year to help them be best prepared for universal free school meals. We will publish full contact details on our website.

You should talk with your catering provider and local authority as soon as possible. Caterers may have ideas of how you can achieve this and may be a big help.

The Government has published an evaluation report of the Pilots, which goes into some detail. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementing-the-free-school-meals-pilot>. We have produced a short '*Lessons Learnt*' document, which takes the main headings from this report and from conversations we have had with those other Local Authorities that have already implemented the Policy.

In February we will publish a 'Toolkit', which will distil the most helpful findings and advice from the pilot Boroughs and those other local authorities (Islington, Southwark and Tower Hamlets) that have already implemented the policy.

Please take time to study the School Food Plan. The delivery of the 16 actions in the Plan will, collectively transform what children eat in school and how children learn about food.

The School Food Plan has produced a Head teacher's Checklist, available at http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/SCHOOL_FOOD_PLAN_CHECKLIST.pdf which has been designed to be printed out and pinned up in your office, in the office of your business manager and in the school kitchen.

The School Food Plan website also has an active news section, and a big list of expert organisations, national and local, that you may find of help. These include the Children's Food Trust, Food for Life Partnership, LACA, School Food Matters, APSE and many others.

16. Tell me more about the School Food Plan

In the summer of 2013 the Tories, Lib Dems and Labour all welcomed the publication of the School Food Plan and endorsed the sixteen actions it set out to improve the food and food culture in schools.



Schools will be driving through two major structural changes from the plan from September 2014. All children in reception to year two will receive free school meals and practical cookery will be compulsory on the curriculum for KS 1 to 3.

However, we know that excellence does not come about by government decree. It is driven by great leaders, and by cooks who are given the right circumstances in which to flourish. All of the schools that The School Food plan visited that had great food cultures have three things in common:

1. They concentrate on the things children care about: good food, attractive environment, social life, price, brand.
2. They took a 'whole school approach' to food, integrating food into the life of the school: treating the dining hall as the hub of the school, where children and teachers eat together; lunch as part of the school day; the cooks as important staff members; and food as part of a rounded education.
3. They have a head teacher who leads the change.

Unless schools succeed in getting these things in place, the legal changes will be meaningless. That is why it is so important that all of the other actions in the plan are well executed.

Through the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), food is being incorporated into head teacher training and the atmosphere in the dining room will become part of an Ofsted inspection. Money is being made available to support schools that need professional support to increase take-up and there is funding to introduce breakfast clubs to hundreds of schools across the country. One team is setting up a website to share best practice across the country and another is tasked with finding a solution to the particular challenges faced by small schools. And much more.

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