

Children's
Services

Children and Young People Select Committee Free School Meals Briefing

6 December 2024

Natalie Smith (Assistant Director, Education and Inclusion)

Income based free school meals (FSM)

The Education Act (1996) requires maintained schools and academies (including free schools) to provide free school meals to disadvantaged pupils who are aged between 5 and 16 years old.

Section 512 of the Education Act 1996, as amended, places a duty on these schools to provide free school meals to pupils of all ages that meet the criteria.

Purpose of FSM

To ensure children have access to at least one healthy meal each day

- Support the development of long-term healthy eating habits
- Help families with the cost-of-living
- Enable all children to have the same opportunities, to learn and flourish

Added value

Families who benefit from FSM are eligible for funded places on the Holiday Activities and Food Programmes (HAF) during school holidays where they can also get free school meals and avoid holiday hunger.

Income based free school meals (FSM) eligibility criteria

FSM are available to pupils in receipt of, or whose parents are in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided parents are not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after the parent(s) stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit - if parents apply on or after 1 April 2018 the household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits received).

Eligibility protection

Some pupils are currently protected against losing their FSM as follows:

- Since 1 April 2018, all existing FSM claimants have continued to receive free school meals whilst Universal Credit is rolled out. This applies even if their earnings rise above the threshold during that time.
- Any pupil gaining eligibility for free school meals after 1 April 2018 will be protected against losing free school meals until March 2025.
- After March 2025, any existing claimants that no longer meet the eligibility criteria at that point (because they are earning above the threshold or are no longer a recipient of Universal Credit) will continue to receive free school meals until the end of their current phase of education (i.e. primary or secondary).

A pupil is only eligible to receive a free school meal when a claim for the meal has been made on their behalf and their eligibility, or protected status, has been verified by the school where they are enrolled or by the local authority.

FSM – School funding

- FSM data for funding is collected through school census data.
- Census data includes the number of pupils on roll on census days, who have periods of eligibility and the number of children who eat a meal on these designated days.
- Schools receive government funding of £2.58 per meal (2024/25), 5p higher than Universal Infant Free School Meal (UIFSM) funding.
- Registration for income based free school meals provides schools with additional funding known as the Pupil Premium grant to support children with their wider education. This equates to £1,480 per primary age child and £1,050 per secondary student, per annum (2024/25).

FSM eligibility in Hampshire

36,514* pupils are eligible for income-based free school meals in Hampshire. **19.8%** of the total pupil population.

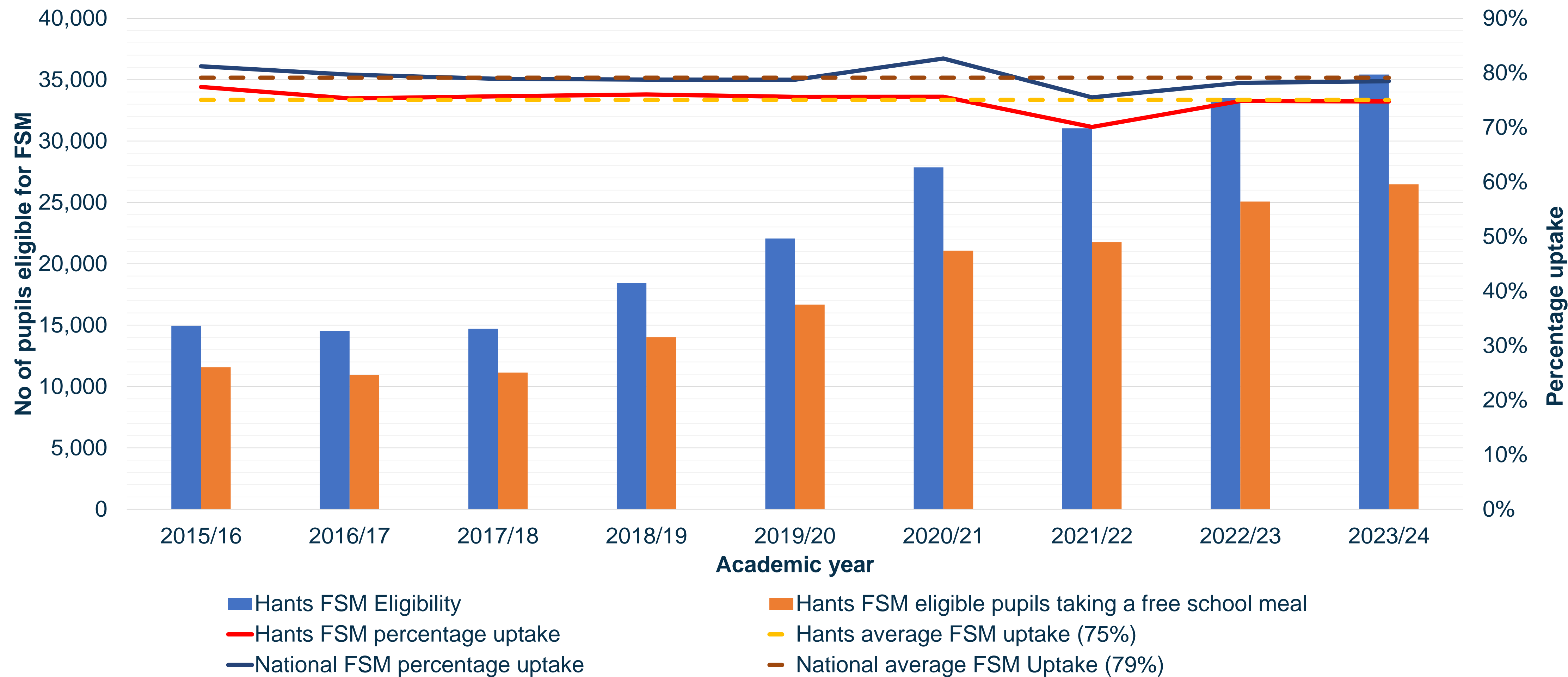
- Responsibility for checking eligibility of applicants for FSM rests with the school.
- Many schools choose to work with local authorities to carry out these checks via the online Eligibility Checking System (ECS).
- Education Catering provides access via our online self-service system, enabling parents to check eligibility and register for income-based free school meals.
- The online system performs checks with the Department for Work and Pensions, the Home Office and HMRC to provide an instant decision. Most applications are dealt with online.
- The alternative to online application is for parents to take appropriate documentation into schools for school staff to verify and confirm eligibility. This mainly relates to where physical checking is required due to specific circumstances.
- In addition, over 1,600 FSM enquiries are answered annually via phone or email by the Education Catering team.

* Children's Services Number on Roll dashboard: 16 May 2024 data

FSM: Education Other Than At School (EOTAS)

- Children who may not be at school due to various reasons.
- It does not include those pupils whose parents have made the decision to electively home educate (EHE).
- No specific financial provision is made in legislation for free school meals to be provided to children who are in receipt of EOTAS: cost pressure for the County Council.
- The County Council will fund these meals as per the government UIFSM funding, for 190 days per school year.
- For EOTAS children, the Government expects local authorities to consider making equivalent food provision for children who are receiving EOTAS and who meet both of the following criteria:
 - the child would meet the criteria for FSM if they were in a state funded school, and
 - meals would be provided in conjunction with education to enable the child to benefit fully from the education being provided.
- Children with EHC Plans awaiting a placement: the same eligibility criteria applies, and meals may be provided temporarily, until the placement is secured. Awaiting placement is defined as a child/young person who is not on roll at a school setting.

FSM eligibility and uptake: Hampshire



Data: Department for Education accredited official statistics

FSM and UIFSM Eligibility in Hampshire by District

HIAS District All Schools	Eligible for FSM	Percentage of total pupils	Eligible for UIFSM*	Percentage of total pupils
Basingstoke	4,867	19.7%	31,989	26%
East Hants	2,118	15.9%	15,304	23%
Eastleigh	3,816	19.1%	23,154	23%
Fareham	2,608	16.1%	19,165	24%
Gosport	2,987	28.5%	12,238	23%
Hart	1,649	11.6%	16,805	24%
Havant	6,009	30.6%	22,826	23%
New Forest	4,383	21%	22,535	21%
Rushmoor	2,615	21.4%	17,364	29%
Test Valley	3,130	18.5%	22,553	27%
Winchester	2,332	14.8%	18,187	23%
Total	36,514	19.8%	222,120	24%

*UIFSM figures includes Key Stage 1 FSM eligible children

FSM automatic enrolment

- Private Members' Bill presented on 16 October 2024: Free School Meals (Automatic Registration of Eligible Children) Bill.
- The proposal being discussed is that all children eligible for free school meals are automatically registered, also enabling schools to claim the additional funding.
- Department for Education (DfE) estimated in 2023 that around 11% of children eligible for FSM are not currently registered. On this basis, 4,017 children in Hampshire may not be registered and schools could be missing out on over £4 million of Pupil Premium funding.
- Trials of auto enrolment in Sheffield and various London boroughs, and recently by ['FixOurFood'](#) report the increase in registration and the improved income for schools but not an increase in FSM uptake. However, the additional school funding should support educational attainment.
- House of Lords Food, Diet and Obesity Committee held on 25/10/24 included enabling auto-enrolment for Healthy Start and free school meals as a key action to turn the tide on obesity.

Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM)

222,120 pupils in Hampshire are eligible for UIFSM.

24% of all Hampshire's pupils.

Note: some of these will be eligible for FSM

Aim of UIFSM:

To improve educational attainment, children's social skills and behaviour.

Eligibility and Funding

All Key Stage 1 pupils (Reception Year, Year 1 and Year 2) are entitled to a meal at school, free of charge.

- No registration is required.
- Each child will be able to have a hot, two course lunch

Schools receive government funding of £2.53 per meal.

Funding is not ringfenced for meals.



Examples of social media posts

Education Catering uptake

Within the schools where Education Catering provides the meals, the uptake for FSM and UIFSM in 2023/24 was:

	Average number of primary pupils entitled to meals	Primary schools pupil uptake	Average number of secondary students entitled to meals	Secondary school student uptake
FSM	17,658	68%	2,729	55%
UIFSM	31,789	74%	n/a	n/a

Education Catering promotion of FSM in 2024

Posters with direct link to FSM checker from QR code. Displayed in 21 community pantries across Hampshire and in all Hampshire libraries.

Hampshire County Council
Education Catering
ARE YOU ELIGIBLE FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS?
Ages 4-18
FIND OUT HERE
www.hants.gov.uk/educationcatering

Crafted specific messaging and creative through social media, engaging 1000's of families and signposting to updated web content.

Advertising FSM, Q&A events and census day examples on social media

- Held 3 online Facebook 'shout out' sessions for parents to ask questions in real time.
- Produced video aimed at secondary school families: <https://youtu.be/P8rsRD62kw0>

NEW YEAR & BACK TO SCHOOL
FACEBOOK SHOUT OUT
THIS WEDNESDAY
4 SEPTEMBER
6.30PM – 7.30PM
FOOD TO FLOURISH
JOIN US FOR TASTY FREE SCHOOL LUNCHES FOR EVERY YEAR R CHILD STARTING SCHOOL
SAY YES TO SUCCESS
ARE YOU ELIGIBLE FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS?
PARENTS & GUARDIANS
How you can help our school's funding?
CENSUS DAY, WHAT IS IT?
It's an important day in the primary school calendar, as the Government will use the numbers of children who eat school meals on this day to identify the level of funding each school receives. Put simply, the more children eating a school lunch on this day, the more funding our school can access.
Date for the diary
3 OCTOBER 2024
75% OF OUR MEALS ARE PREPARED FROM SCRATCH
FOOD TO FLOURISH
WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT TO GROW OUR GOVERNMENT FUNDING... HERE'S HOW!

Education Catering working with other HCC services to promote FSM awareness and uptake

- Admissions: included a link to Education Catering's FSM online content in offer letters. Updated admissions' parent guide to applying for a school place ready for academic year.
- Early years: signposted preschool/nursery parents to links for Year R hub and FSM info for transition into reception – summer bulletin. Crafted articles for the Early Years Parents/Carers bitesize newsletter, circulated by providers. Gave six virtual provider briefings and three virtual birth-to four briefings. Wrote SFYC blog article to reach early years education providers/out of schools.
- Portage team: briefed team who visit families which may have SEN or children with SEN or who will be attending special schools about FSM. Article in portage newsletter to prompt families when they receive school place to apply for FSM; these families have higher levels of FSM.
- HAF: recorded segway that went to providers for autumn intake about food and transition on school readiness and FSM for specific HAF live session with school heads and HAF providers. Regular ongoing monthly articles in the HAF provider newsletter, asking providers to signpost about FSM.
- Library settings: EC staff attended 3 libraries during Feb half term in areas of deprivation to talk directly to parents about eligibility and dispel the myths. Linked to FSM content from library website about cost-of-living resources/ food cost of living resources.
- HIAS: prepared PowerPoint slide for inspectors to use to highlight FSM and Census uptake to schools.
- Held a 'starting school' Teams event for HCC network parent group, with a focus on FSM eligibility.