

Free School Meals Guidance Note

This guidance note should be read in conjunction with the latest information from the Department of Education. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance> which outlines the DfE's expectations of schools in ensuring that eligible pupils continue to have access to free school meals. This includes access during the holiday period, school closures and also the provision of meals for children who have to stay at home because they or family members are displaying COVID-19 related symptoms.

Use of your Catering Team

For schools within the KCC Framework

Kent County Council has reached agreement with the contractors within the KCC framework to provide additional financial support to them so that they are able to continue to provide meals to schools, as required, during this time. The agreement will mean that the cost of school based staff, transport and meals are fully covered. The providers have also been encouraged to seek additional Government led support through the schemes for businesses to cover any other company overheads which are not covered through this agreement. KCC will be coordinating this provision in accordance with school requirements to ensure the most efficient use of resources.

We hope that these clear guarantees will provide the necessary reassurance for contractors and schools as they begin to work through how the new requirements can be delivered during the coming months. All schools and academies will have allocated resource from their delegated budgets to meet FSM costs. Once the position becomes clearer in relation to the burden of cost that has been met by Government then KCC will work with the DfE and all schools to make the appropriate adjustments.

For those schools with in-house provisions or using providers outside of the KCC Framework

We appreciate that these are extremely challenging times and that you are being called upon to make difficult and unwanted decisions. These are crucial services which we need to maintain so that they remain available beyond the current crisis.

Schools will have already started conversations with their own directly employed staff or catering provider to discuss their requirements. Schools may want to consider following a similar approach to that which KCC has agreed with KCC framework providers. Schools will need to understand that they will be required to forward fund any arrangement of this kind. The DfE and KCC recognise that there is likely to be additional expense created through these arrangements and we await imminent additional guidance from the DfE on how this is to be met.

Where you do not require a contractor to provide meals then in the first instance you should encourage them to seek Government led support via their business support packages including the coronavirus retention scheme which covers 80% of staff costs.

Where you do still require meals but to a limited extent then you should attempt to reach agreement with the contractor on similar terms to those which KCC has agreed with framework contractors. Where this is the case you will need to maintain a separate record of how much this is costing to use as a basis for claiming any net shortfall from Government.

Where you provide the service in-house you will not be eligible for Government led business support and you should continue to meet staffing cost whilst keeping a record of these costs to support a future claim.

Further information on the use of Supermarket vouchers

National Supermarket Voucher Scheme

The DfE is currently developing a national approach to providing support for FSM through the use of supermarket vouchers. The details of the national scheme are expected to be published very shortly with an expectation for implementation from as early as next week.

Purchasing Supermarket Vouchers

If you wish to purchase food vouchers for use with local food retailers please note the following:

- You will need a company registration and VAT registration number
- Kent schools should use their full DfE number (e.g. 886-1234) for the company registration number
- Kent Maintained Schools should use the VAT number GB204269191
- Academies will need to use their own VAT number
- Schools will have to register via www.gov.uk to declare how many Free School Meal pupils they have and if they are not providing an in-house meal how many pupils are being allocated vouchers instead
- Payments will need to be made using a bank card or equivalent and you may have to increase your limit to be able to complete the purchase. For maintained schools, please refer to the list of Other related finance FAQs” for further details
https://www.kelsi.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/106249/Other-School-Finance-Related-FAQs.pdf

Appropriate Value of Supermarket Vouchers

It will be up to individual schools to determine the value of the vouchers that they wish to purchase for parents and carers of eligible children but thought should be given to the true cost of purchasing food on an individual basis rather than the economies of scale that catering contractors work to. National guidance on this is still to be published but is likely to suggest a daily meal cost of £3, so £15 per week.