

Ongoing provision of Free School Meals for vulnerable children and young people

Provision of Free School Meals for children and young people from Monday 23 March 2020

On 18 March, the government announced that schools, nurseries and further education providers will close to the majority of learners from Friday 20 March, but remain open for those young people who have a social worker, those who have an EHCP or who have parents/carers who are key workers.

Children and Families is working with schools, the council's catering division and other partners to ensure that vulnerable children and their families continue to receive the necessary support, which includes access to food/free school meals.

We are also working on arrangements for the forthcoming school holidays through the Healthy Holidays Scheme, and will update members on this in light of the emerging situation.

Free School Meals

The government has produced advice for schools on FSM today (19 March), which can be read in full using this link <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools>

In summary, the DfE advises schools to contact their school catering team (in house) or school catering provider to see if they can prepare meals or food parcels that could be delivered to, or collected by families.

In preparation for the necessity for schools to close, Leeds City Council's catering team, Catering Leeds, has already put a plan in place to deliver 14,000 meals every day for means tested free school meal children (and families who are highlighted as vulnerable by headteachers). Catering Leeds look after 187 primary schools and two secondary schools across the city.

Utilising 28 hubs across Leeds, distribution points for each of these schools have been established so their allocation of meals can be collected from these sites or delivered directly to them where this is proving hard to arrange.

This provision includes catering for all children with a special dietary requirement. To begin with, vegetarian, cold 'grab bag' lunches will be issued. Special diet children will receive a meal which excludes all of the 14 main allergens and where necessary a bespoke meal will be put in place for complex dietary needs.

The remaining schools in Leeds use either a private catering provider or prepare meals inhouse. Staff from our Early Help Hubs are contacting all of these schools to discuss the

arrangements they are making for the ongoing provision of free school meals and to offer support as necessary.

In addition, the guidance from DfE includes the following information:

Supermarket vouchers

The DfE is currently developing a national approach to providing support through supermarket and shop vouchers. We will provide further details shortly.

If your school is closed and your school catering team cannot provide meals or food parcels, you should offer families of pupils eligible for free school meals an alternative.

Schools can order supermarket and shop vouchers directly from a number of retailers – usually through their corporate division. They recommend sourcing vouchers for supermarkets or shops in the local area. Where possible they should be restricted for use against age-related products.

Schools will get a choice of:

- e-vouchers (where available) - which you can email directly to parents
- gift cards - which may be more suitable if parents do not have access to the internet

Schools should check which pupils are eligible and currently in receipt of free school meals, and vouchers should be made available to the parent or the adult with caring responsibility for that child.

Additional costs

The DfE understands that some of these approaches may mean that schools and other educational establishments go to additional expense.

They will provide further guidance shortly on how they will compensate schools who incur additional costs in providing free school meals or vouchers to pupils affected by coronavirus (COVID-19).

Children and Families will also be communicating information and local guidance for schools on FSM and ways that they can support families and pupils with access to food in general.