

Free School Meals Auto-Enrolment in Hillingdon



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Free School Meals

- Free school meals (FSM) is an important component of the support provided to low-income families
- Reasons for not taking up FSM:
 - Paperwork/bureaucracy of having to apply
 - Low awareness, language barriers
 - Stigma or embarrassment
- Impact of this:
 - Schools unable to claim pupil premium and other important funding
 - Children missing out on healthy meals
 - Families missing on extra funds

What is Auto-Enrolment?

- It's recognised that schools make significant efforts to register FSM eligible children at first registration. The auto-enrolment process serves to support and supplement that process.
- Free School Meal auto-enrolment uses existing welfare data to sign children up automatically.
- Hillingdon has taken the approach of "opt-out / auto enrolment"
- This is a cross service exercise between **Data Protection**, Finance, Data, Education and Revenues & Benefits Teams to identify eligible Children and Young People.
- Schools would receive additional grant funding through the FSM Deprivation element of the DSG – the element of schools' budgets that covers the cost of providing meals. Schools would further receive Pupil Premium deprivation funding currently at: Primary £1550 and Secondary £1100. Also note that several historic grant calculations are based on FSM eligibility, most recently the COVID Catchup grant.

Timeline

- June/ July – comms to schools to confirm auto enrolment exercise over the Summer
- August – undertake data matching once we have the May 2026 Census information from schools
- Between 31st August 2026 – 21st September 2026 - LA to send out opt out letters to parents/ guardians and note any responses
- 22nd September – 30th September – once final list of pupils has been provided, emails to be sent to schools with pupils identified
- Check data and record on October Census 2026



Request to Schools

- When Schools receive the list of eligible children that have been identified through the auto enrolment process, they are requested to add the information onto their FSM return and inform Household Support, in the normal way.
- To ensure National Insurance data for parents is recorded on school system as well as Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN)
- Please update October Census with new data

