



Free School Meals Auto-Enrolment Project Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

- Many families could be claiming free school meals (and saving approximately £500 per year) and also accessing free holiday activities and help with other expenses.
- Many schools are missing out on pupil premium funding to help their most disadvantaged pupils (£1,550 per primary pupil and £1,100 per secondary pupil per year).
- To help with this, many councils have been looking at implementing Free School Meals (FSM) auto-enrolment schemes to support schools in identifying eligible children and to ensure children do not miss out.

Free School Meals Auto-Enrolment schemes

- Sheffield City Council first implemented FSM auto-enrolment (opt out) in 2016, and between then and 2022, an additional 6,403 children were registered for FSM, and Sheffield schools benefited from an extra £3.8 million in Pupil Premium funding.
- Hillingdon Council are in the second year of the FSM auto-enrolment programme.

What is the aim of the Free School Meals Auto-Enrolment (opt out) project for Hillingdon


- The project aims to identify children attending full time education at school in Hillingdon who are entitled to FSM but whose families have not applied and automatically enrol them (unless they opt out).

What are the benefits of this project? Why are we doing it?

- To increase the uptake of free school lunches across all age groups, helping more children to eat a nutritious meal.
- Reduce food insecurity and save families money – the value to families of school meals which is around £500 per child per year.
- Enable more children on FSM to access the other benefits including free holiday activities and help with other expenses.

- Increase the Pupil Premium funding into schools – this is around £1,550 per primary school-aged child and £1,100 per secondary school-aged child.
- Remove the barriers that families often face when applying (e.g. around language, literacy, cultural or technical issues).

What is involved?

- The process involves analysing benefits data to identify families in Hillingdon whose children attend a school in the borough and are eligible for FSM but have not yet applied.
- Families identified from the data analysis work will be informed by letter that their child/ren are potentially entitled to FSM and will be automatically enrolled unless they opt out from 31st August – 21st September 2026 by:
 - **Scanning this QR code to take you to a form:** 



- **Submit a written response to:** Education Team, London Borough of Hillingdon, Civic Centre, 2W, High Street, Uxbridge, UB8 1UW
- Families who opt out but remain eligible will be contacted again the following year (if FSM auto-enrolment is undertaken) to ask if they would like to opt out again.
- Families who do NOT opt out will be registered by the Education Team.
- Schools will be provided with a list of children that have been enrolled for FSM.

How will it work?

- The auto-enrolment process will be carried out annually.
- It is designed to identify those families whose children could be having free school meals, but for whatever reason have not applied.
- FSM auto-enrolment will NOT replace all the existing actions, communications and activity that occurs to help entitled families to apply and get registered for FSM.

Which schools will be involved?

- FSM auto-enrolment will be offered to ALL state funded schools in Hillingdon.

What is the timescale for the project?

- We are planning on doing FSM auto-enrolment checks for Hillingdon in August this year, allowing families to opt out from 31st August – 21st September. We then aim to clarify with schools by the end of September which additional children have been identified for FSM.
- The aim is to complete the exercise ahead of the October census so that schools can claim the pupil premium funding next year. We would be looking to repeat the process annually.

What will schools need to do?

- Schools will need to ensure that they update October Census with new data and continue to inform Household Support Team accordingly.
- This information is being shared with schools on the understanding that the pupil named is either currently on roll or is expected to join the school in September 2026. If the pupil is not on roll at the time of the October census, please follow the established procedure for off-rolling. There is no requirement to respond to the Education Team regarding this notification.
- Data related to children in school-based nurseries will be collected through the schools' termly funding claims. Schools will need to follow the guidance from the local authority for making these claims.

What about communications to schools and families?

- We do not envisage the need for any widespread general communication to families about FSM auto-enrolment as this may cause confusion and families may be less likely to apply themselves.
- The families who are identified during the FSM auto-enrolment process will be notified by letter.
- We are communicating with schools in various ways to keep them informed.

Who are the main contacts for more information?

- **Email:** FSM@hillingdon.gov.uk
- **Write to:** Education Team, London Borough of Hillingdon, Civic Centre, 2W, High Street, Uxbridge, UB8 1UW