



Money Home Job

Date: 24 March 2020
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Dear Parents / Carers / Teachers

Update about Free School Meals - Walsall

Please find below a range of information in response to frequently asked questions.

1. What help is being offered to children who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM)?

The government issued national guidance about what schools should do to support children in receipt of Free School Meals. The guidance is available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance?utm_source=3f539155-e787-4148-bae0-837af3b037c5&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

2. My child is eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) but the school is closed, can I still receive support towards a meal?

Please contact your child's school via the telephone or email. They will be able to advise you about the specific support that they have put in place to support children who are eligible for FSM. Not all schools use Walsall Council's catering team and those that do not will need to advise you directly on the arrangements that they have put in place. Under the government scheme, schools may provide a meal pack, packed lunch, or a voucher, which is redeemable from local supermarkets.

If your school is closed, and you are unable to get through to them via the telephone or email, please contact the Council's Free Schools Meal team on COVID-19communityhelp@walsall.gov.uk with your child's name, date of birth, and address, and we will do our best to liaise with the school on your behalf to find a solution.

3. What other support is available families who are struggling to afford to feed their children or who are self-isolating and cannot get out to buy food?

We are working closely with a number of partner organisations in order to provide support to families. You can contact Making Connections by emailing: COVID-19communityhelp@walsall.gov.uk or by calling 0121 380 6690. They will allocate your case to one of the four locality hubs who will arrange to contact you to discuss your needs. They will also be able to provide practical help with things such as shopping, picking up prescriptions or financial advice if you are self-isolating.

4. My circumstances have recently changed and I am now out of work or on a low income. Will I qualify for FSM?

Information regarding the eligibility criteria for FSM and our online claim form can be found using the following links to websites:

https://go.walsall.gov.uk/free_school_meals

<https://go.walsall.gov.uk/forms/Application-for-Free-School-Meals>

The Council's benefits team are still processing applications from families who apply for Free School Meals. If you apply, and qualify, we will write to you and also inform your child's school so they can put arrangements in place for your child.

5. I am unable to leave my house due to self-isolation / mobility problems and so cannot access the help available from my child's school.

We are working closely with a number of partner organisations in order to provide support to families. You can contact Making Connections by emailing: COVID-19communityhelp@walsall.gov.uk or by calling 0121 380 6690. They will allocate your case to one of the four locality hubs who will arrange to contact you to discuss your needs. They will also be able to provide practical help with things such as shopping, picking up prescriptions or financial advice.

6. Not all of my children are eligible for a FSM, but I have recently lost my job, what do I do?

Please make a claim for FSM based on your new circumstances (as per Q4 above) and we will check to see if you now qualify for FSM. You can also seek support from Making Connections by emailing: COVID-19communityhelp@walsall.gov.uk or by calling 0121 380 6690. They will allocate your case to one of the four locality hubs who will arrange to contact you to discuss your needs. They will also be able to provide practical help with things such as shopping, picking up prescriptions or financial advice if you are unable to leave your home.

7. I've been notified that I do not qualify for FSM, but I still need help, what do can I do?

We are working closely with a number of partner organisations in order to provide support to families. You can contact Making Connections by emailing: COVID-19communityhelp@walsall.gov.uk or by calling 0121 380 6690. They will allocate your case to one of the four locality hubs who will arrange to contact you to discuss your needs. They will also be able to provide practical help with things such as shopping, picking up prescriptions or financial advice.

8. Can the Council help me with Free School Meals (FSM)?

The Council is only involved in providing catering services for 33 schools in Walsall. In these schools, the catering team continue to provide hot meals to Key Worker Children who are still attending school, and hot meal provision is also available to vulnerable children who need meals (at the schools discretion). From Wednesday 25 March 2020, the Council will also be able to provide packed lunches to children who require a Free School Meal but are not attending lessons. The school will distribute the lunch bags or arrange for parents to collect them from the school.

Schools have today (24 March 2020) also been issued with a stock of physical vouchers that they can distribute to families and children who they believe are unable to attend school to collect the daily lunch bags. As the national voucher scheme from the government is not yet available, the Council is also currently exploring how to provide electronic vouchers to the schools we cater for (which we hope they can then issue to families electronically without having to attend the school in person).

9. What if a school in Walsall is struggling to provide a Free School Meals (FSM)?

In accordance with the government scheme (as detailed in Q1), every school has responsibility to make their own arrangements to provide food for children in receipt of FSM. In circumstances where a school in Walsall is having problems with putting provision in place, the Council will do our best to offer support and assistance.

Schools and individuals can request help by emailing:

COVID-19communityhelp@walsall.gov.uk.

Please provide a name and contact number and the details of your problem and our team will contact you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Elise Hopkins
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