



## **Free School Meals**

In the absence of further Government instruction following the Prime Ministers announcement on Monday that extra support will be provided for FSM during this lockdown, we have worked with our providers to ensure the provision of school food be maintained, and are now communicating to schools as quickly as possible. The below arrangements may be subject to further change should the Government announce any changes to current FSM guidance, that was last updated in November 2020. If this is the case, and it effects the solutions below, then we will update schools.

From April to end of October 2020 the Council had in place PPN supplier relief payment arrangements between schools and Chartwells, Easy Lunch. By having this arrangement, it ensures that the suppliers and their supply chain remain solvent, and able to switch back on a full service as and when required. This was proven when we restarted the service in full in September. It safeguards the 600 or so local workforce and ensures they remain on full pay and able to work when are needed. We are now facing very similar circumstances as with the first national lockdown and the principles of the PPN still remain sound and are currently the best option for us to ensure school meal provision and continuity. The payments being paid to both Chartwells and Easy Lunch will be for a fixed daily amount during term time, and have been calculated based on the expected level of grant income each school will receive for Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM), and the average number of additional FSMs ordered during February 2020. The daily fixed amount to schools will be the same as it was before in the original PPN period.

Since these payment levels are fixed, whilst these temporary arrangements are in place, for maintained schools both suppliers will be sending their invoices to County Hall where they will be paid centrally by the Schools Finance Team. (This will also apply to back dated invoices from 4 January 2021). Under the same set of principles, academies will continue to receive invoices directly from the suppliers. This arrangement will run up until at least the February half term. Should they be required to continue past the February half term we will let schools know.

Maintained schools will receive their share of these costs through the monthly data transfer and will be notified by the Schools Finance Team when this happens and the time period the costs apply. A reminder of the breakdown of the daily fixed payment amounts being paid to the suppliers by individual schools will be sent out to School Business Managers through their Top Tips communications later this week. Under the same set of principles, academies will continue to receive invoices directly from the suppliers.

## **Children in school**

If you receive meals from either Chartwells or Easy Lunch, then you should order enough food for ALL the children you expect in school. This includes FSM, UIFSM, and key worker/vulnerable children who are not FSM or UIFSM. All KS2 children whose parents pre-ordered meals for this week and onwards have been refunded by Chartwells, with the usual admin fee waived. There is already enough food in schools for all children to eat meals WC 4 January.

## **Children out of school**

If you receive meals from either Chartwells or Easy Lunch, then you should order a food parcel with your Area Manager for those FSM children not attending school. Please do not order these weekly parcels for FSM attending school, as they will be eating FSM in school. We are currently ramping up the supply chain to be able to provide the volume of parcels required for WC 11 January. The earlier you can order these parcels, the quicker they will come in-to school. They will be assembled by the catering staff, and as per the isolation bubble parcels, and left in a prearranged place for the school to arrange their collection by parents once a week adhering to all current social distancing measures. Please note there is no requirement to feed any UIFSM children who are not in school. The Chartwells food parcel items will all be ambient apart from cheese which will be stored in the catering fridge until required for collection, please liaise with on-site catering staff regarding this and planned times for collection by parents. Please encourage parents to bring a reusable shopping bag to help them transport the goods back home.

### **Hot school meals – additional KS2 guidance**

Schools continue to have an obligation to provide FSM and KS1 UIFSM. However, the obligation around KS2 is not a statutory provision. The Council have negotiated the inclusion of free meals for KS2 pupils, who do not fall under the FSM or UIFSM criteria, in the best interest of the pupils.

It is clear with social distancing requirements that maintaining hot meal provision is a challenge, and the Council is grateful for schools and their caterers considering how this can be achieved in order that we continue to meet with the statutory provision and the mandatory School Food Standards 2014. However, for schools with a KS2 cohort if, following risk assessment, you do not deem it possible to include this year group for hot meals, then you need only provide the hot meals for FSM and UIFSM eligible children. The children not FSM or UIFSM in this case would be required to bring in a packed meal from home.

### **Vouchers**

There are currently no plans for a term time Government FSM voucher scheme. Therefore, we have agreed with our suppliers for the provision of food parcels for FSM children not in school, within the daily payment amount school will pay. The vouchers provided to FSM children via Edenred and Wonde during the Christmas holiday was a WSCC scheme, using money from the Government Winter Covid Fund allocated to West Sussex. WSCC are planning to provide the funding to schools for a similar scheme over February half term, and more details will follow on that towards the end of this month.

### **Special Schools**

We are liaising with the special school head teachers to continue providing a school meal service that meets the pupils' needs and is in line with the DfE guidance. From 4 January hot meals will continue to be provided in the specials school for all children attending school. Food parcels will be supplied for FSM children not attending school. Please continue to discuss directly with Helen Turner your requirements and any changes required.

### **All other schools**

Please continue to talk to your contractor or in-house catering team to ensure that school meal provision is maintained. In school meals must be provided for FSM and UIFSM children. Outside of

school food parcels or another means of providing a daily meal to FSM children must be provided. All other meal requirements are to be found in the DfE guidance.

### **Community Hub Support for Families in Need**

We would be grateful if you could remind your parents and staff that all children and families who need support during lockdown can contact the Council's Community Hub, which is there to provide help during the COVID pandemic.

The Community Hub, which was set up in March 2020, gives practical support and information to anyone adversely affected by COVID-19, which could include the provision of food and essential household supplies.

Contact is totally confidential and is available seven days a week, between 8am and 8pm when staff will be on hand to respond to enquiries.

You can find more information and request support online at

[www.westsussex.gov.uk/covid19communityhub](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/covid19communityhub) or to speak to someone call: 033 022 27980.