

PROPOSED CHARGING FOR PROCESSING OF FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Purpose of the Report

1. This report sets out charges that will apply from September 2014 for academies, both in and out of the County, that require the Council to undertake the administration of free school meals (FSM) eligibility checks.

Information and Advice

2. In February 2014 there were 6,589 pupils in academies authorised to receive FSM and 8,990 in maintained schools.
3. The Council's Support to Schools Service has historically undertaken the administration and eligibility checks for all children applying for FSM. Since the development of academies the service has continued to undertake these checks at no cost. It also undertakes the eligibility assessments for 1 academy outside of the County. In effect, the community schools are subsidising this service to academies and an equitable charging process has, therefore, been developed.
4. Any pupil who is eligible for FSM attracts a Pupil Premium payment. It is, therefore, beneficial to the pupil, their family and the school for free schools meals to be actively promoted and taken up by parents. This is also in line with recent correspondence from Rt Hon David Laws MP which requires local authorities to support schools in registering pupils eligible for free school meals.
5. The automated checking process undertaken by the service removes the necessity for parents to present documentation to support their claim as the service has access to the DfE Electronic Checking System (ECS) and can undertake the checks remotely. The ease of assessing eligibility for parents ensures that individuals are not deterred from taking up FSM due to a seemingly burdensome process.
6. The service undertakes eligibility checks on a weekly basis. This ensures that there are no changes in the parents' circumstances that may impact on eligibility and requires the school to seek retrospective payments. If the service identifies that the eligibility status has changed then they contact both the parents and the school to clarify the situation. This allows the school to retain a positive relationship with parents as they are not responsible for stopping FSM claims or explaining why parents no longer qualify.
7. When pupils change schools (eg transition to secondary) the service is able to inform the receiving school of FSM eligibility, ensuring a seamless transition for the child and their parents.

8. The charging structure has been designed to be as simple as possible. Research into charges levied by other authorities revealed a mix of methodologies. Some authorities charge per eligible child and some charge per pupil on roll. Both of these charging structures were rejected as they increase the administrative burden for both the service and the school and subsequently increase the cost. An annual flat fee was identified as the simplest charging structure.
9. Five bands of charging have been identified depending on the size of the school.

BAND	1	2	3	4	5
Numbers on roll	0-200	201 - 500	501 - 1000	1000 - 1400	1401+
Number of academies	6	24	19	13	8
Charge per school per year	£250	£575	£1,150	£1,600	£1,900

Financial Implications

10. If all academies choose to purchase this service from the Support to Schools Service then revenue of 73k per annum will be generated.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) From September 2014 academies are charged a flat fee for the administration of FSM in line with the banded charges set out above.

Claire Wilcoxson

T: 01159 772640

E: claire.wilcoxson@nottscc.gov.uk