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[Department
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Guidance

Free breakfast clubs: guidance for schools and trusts for phase 1 of the national rollout from April 2026

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Applies to England

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Overview

This guidance is for schools that are delivering free breakfast clubs, funded by the Department for Education (DfE). It is designed to support schools in setting up and running these clubs as well as help them to meet the wider needs of the free breakfast clubs programme.

The government is committed to:

- giving every pupil, regardless of their background [the best start in life](#)
- breaking down the barriers to every child [achieving and thriving](#) at school and in later life, by ensuring they are ready to learn, supporting parents to work and tackling poverty

Delivering on the government's manifesto commitment to ensure state primary schools offer free breakfast clubs to all pupils, DfE is starting a national roll out of free breakfast clubs from April 2026.

Supported by £80 million investment, a further 2,000 new schools will join the 750 schools already successfully delivering free breakfast clubs.

Schools that offer free breakfast clubs report [improvements in behaviour, attendance, and academic attainment](#).

The DfE early adopter scheme launched in April 2025 with 750 schools nationally. This test and learn phase is demonstrating that this approach works, with schools already reporting benefits including:

- improved punctuality and attendance
- a calmer environment during the school day ensuring children are ready to learn

Learnings from early adopters have been used to inform our approach for national rollout, including a refined funding model. DfE continues to learn from their experiences, sharing best practices to support new schools joining the programme.

We have updated this guidance to reflect what we have learned from early adopters to provide clearer practical information, including:

- expanded detail on delivery models
- the support model for schools, including the role of local authorities

Who this guidance is for

This guidance is for schools and trusts that are delivering free breakfast clubs.

It may also be of interest to:

- local authorities in fulfilling their role of supporting the effective delivery of school-age childcare, through their existing duty to ensure sufficient childcare places
- private, voluntary and independent (PVI) childcare providers, including childminders, who may partner with schools to deliver free breakfast clubs – either standalone, or as part of a wider offer of before and after school care

How to use this guidance

This guidance uses the word ‘must’ where the requirement is mandatory as set out in the [Breakfast club conditions of grant](#), or is a statutory requirement.

Where the guidance uses the word ‘should’, providers are expected to take the guidance into account when delivering the requirements and are encouraged to follow it, unless there is a good reason not to.

This guidance is for schools on the free breakfast club programme, or those considering applying for a place in the financial year 2026 to 2027. More detail about support available to schools is available in the section on [support for schools and trusts](#).

Designing free breakfast clubs

Minimum requirements

As set out in the grant conditions, schools and trusts engaged on the programme must deliver a breakfast club that is:

- open to all pupils on roll at the school in reception to Year 6
- at least 30 minutes in duration, immediately before the start of each compulsory school day
- free and accessible
- providing a breakfast that adheres to the [school food standards for England](#)
- on, or in the vicinity of, the school site

Schools must ensure any such location does not inhibit the policy objective of giving the pupil a settled start to their day. Parents should not have to drop their child off at a location far from the school that could disrupt their working day.

Schools are required to offer a place at their breakfast club that meets all the criteria above to all pupils who want one. Schools cannot limit the number of places available.

Any school that is concerned about their ability to meet the minimum requirements should contact us for additional support. For any questions about guidance, implementation, or requirements, use DfE's [customer help portal](#).

Consider your location, type of food and activities

Beyond the minimum requirements, schools have flexibility over how they design their free breakfast clubs. Schools know their pupils and local communities. They are best placed to decide how to deliver a breakfast club considering their school's existing provision and cohort of pupils.

To create clubs that all pupils want to attend, schools will want to consider:

- the types of food to offer
- the environment the club is hosted in
- activities tailored to children's interests and needs
- space for them to use
- who the staff are and who they are looking after

Be inclusive to all pupils and families

The club should be embedded into the school's, or trust's, wider improvement strategy. This will ensure that the:

- educational benefits are being maximised across the school day
- pupils who will benefit the most are encouraged to attend

Free breakfast clubs give schools more opportunities to enhance the school day and help children learn. This improves behaviour, attendance and attainment, and enhances school readiness at the start of the day. They also provide a seamless transition into the school day. Schools should consider how they can best deliver this to meet the needs of their pupils and parents.

All children can benefit from regularly attending free breakfast clubs, but there are some pupils who may particularly benefit from attending.

School leaders should consider the needs of working parents when designing their free breakfast club offer and ask for their views when planning and delivering the club.

School leaders should:

- consider how to encourage sustained take-up among children who are vulnerable to food poverty and hunger, or those who require extra support in areas such as attendance, behaviour, or wellbeing
- use their knowledge of pupils and families to promote inclusive access and ensure the offer reaches those who need it most

Provide accessible activities

As part of the free breakfast club, schools may want to offer engaging activities that enhance children's development and wellbeing while providing them with a soft start to their school day.

Many schools with successful free breakfast clubs, design their offer by linking activities with areas of educational focus or enrichment and considering the needs of children who will benefit the most. These activities are not limited to but can include:

- arts and crafts activities
- informal group games
- reading and writing activities
- sports and physical activities
- adult supervised free play
- homework support
- outdoor or nature play

Enrichment activities may be delivered by school staff or a PVI childcare provider. They can include pupil leadership, such as older children in the school helping younger pupils – with support and guidance from staff.

Find out more from this case study about [how a school incorporates enriching activities into their free breakfast clubs](#).

Wraparound childcare

The expectation, as set out in the [wraparound childcare: guidance for schools and trusts](#), remains that all schools should provide paid-for wraparound childcare, available before school from 8am and after school until 6pm, on the school site, unless there is a reasonable justification not to.

The new, free breakfast club offer should:

- build on existing school provision and work seamlessly in contributing to the full

wraparound childcare offer.

- help ensure that childcare is more affordable for parents and carers
- not reduce the availability or affordability of wider childcare offers or displace existing provision that is meeting the needs of children and families

The [wraparound childcare: guidance for schools and trusts](#) sets out principles for schools to consider when deciding how to deliver before and after school childcare.

In December 2025, we will publish new school-age childcare guidance. This will:

- set out expectations of local authorities beyond the National Wraparound Childcare Programme, which will end in March 2026
- provide support in delivering sufficient before-school, after-school and holiday childcare

Free breakfast clubs should work with wider before-school childcare offered by the school. All children should be able to access a free breakfast club that meets the minimum requirements. This includes children that attend paid-for before-school childcare that begins before the free breakfast club.

Where schools or PVI childcare providers are operating paid-for provision and a free breakfast club, schools and PVI childcare providers are expected to ensure that:

- parents and carers can benefit from the free club and pay a lower fee for the paid-for provision than they were prior to the introduction of the free breakfast club, reflecting that 30 minutes is free
- under no circumstances are children required to attend paid-for provision to access the free breakfast club

Schools must not introduce any charge that could deter access to the free breakfast club offer. Provision must also be designed and delivered in a way that avoids any stigma for pupils who attend only the free breakfast club.

Funding

This section sets out the funding that schools or trusts will receive when delivering a free breakfast club.

Detailed information about [payment allocations, methodology, grant conditions and reporting requirements](#) is available.

Schools will be funded directly by DfE. Schools should use this funding to cover:

- food, including delivery
- staffing costs
- administrative costs

How funding is calculated

Funding will be calculated on a daily basis.

Mainstream schools will receive:

- £1 per-pupil per day that attends the free breakfast club
- £25 per day to cover fixed costs (including staffing), no matter how many pupils attend

Special schools and alternative provision settings will receive:

- £3.23 per-pupil per day that attends the free breakfast club
- £18.95 per day to cover fixed costs (including staffing), no matter how many pupils attend

When payments will be made

The daily amount will be made as an upfront, lump-sum payment each term. This payment covers the fixed admin and staffing costs of the programme. It is not dependent on the number of pupils that attend, for example, a staff member to prepare and serve food.

The per-pupil payment will be made in arrears, based on the average daily number of pupils that attended their club during a one-week period.

This payment covers the provision of the food and staffing costs that vary depending on the number of pupils attending the club

Both payments will be multiplied by an area cost adjustment, according to their geographical location.

Schools will also receive a one-off start-up grant of £1,000 when they join the programme, to cover the revenue cost of:

- equipment – for example storage, food preparation and servery equipment and play equipment
- training – for example paediatric first aid, food hygiene and allergy management training
- infrastructure and systems – for example breakfast club booking systems and technology products
- other revenue costs associated with setting up the free breakfast club provision

Reporting pupil numbers

Schools should report the number of pupils that have attended the free breakfast club to DfE. Schools should record only those pupils whom they judge to arrive in time to benefit from an earlier start to the school day.

Schools should work proactively with parents and carers to promote punctual attendance, ensuring children can fully access the benefits of the free breakfast club.

Schools should monitor trends in attendance, for example days of the week that are most popular or differences in numbers booked in advance, against the numbers that actually attended. They should then plan and staff accordingly.

Provision of free breakfast clubs

When considering pupil needs, schools have flexibility in how to set up and run their breakfast club. Schools may choose to:

- provide the breakfast club in-house
- outsource to a PVI childcare provider to lead delivery on their behalf on, or in the vicinity of, the school site

On-site provision

Many schools choose to provide free breakfast clubs and wider wraparound childcare directly and on site. Staff may be existing school staff or staff recruited specifically for provision. Benefits of this model can be:

- maintaining high levels of control on every aspect of provision, including activities offered
- continuing existing relationships between school staff and children
- breakfast club complementing wider school and extracurricular activities

An example of an approach to delivering in house is available in the [In-class breakfast stations at Arboretum Primary School case study](#).

Working with PVI childcare providers

Some schools may want to work in partnership with local PVI childcare providers, including childminders.

DfE encourages collaborative, innovative partnership working between schools and PVI childcare providers to ensure that free breakfast clubs best meet the needs of children and families who use them.

Many PVI childcare providers already deliver before-school childcare both on-school and off-school sites, where they are within the vicinity of the school site. DfE encourages schools to build on the existing provision that is in place to support the delivery of free breakfast clubs.

If a PVI childcare provider is already delivering a breakfast club that meets the needs of children and families, then schools should not displace that provision. Instead, they should aim to incorporate the free breakfast club offer as part of the existing provision.

Schools can set up contracts or service level agreements with PVI childcare providers to deliver breakfast club programmes. If a school's planned provision is intending to replace existing provision through a business transfer or takeover, schools should consider whether TUPE regulations apply and seek independent

legal advice as needed.

Working with PVI childcare providers can support schools by:

- reducing the administrative and resource burden on schools
- offering expertise in childcare and activities
- enabling access to before-school childcare (prior to the 30-minute breakfast club), after-school provision and holiday childcare
- gaining additional services, such as lunchtime supervision, sports training and enrichment clubs
- getting help to support with staffing – this supports the sustainability of the partnership between the PVI childcare provider and school

To ensure minimum safe standards in breakfast club programmes:

- all PVI childcare providers funded through the breakfast club programme must be registered with Ofsted
- childminders must be registered with Ofsted or a childminder agency

Information about the different registration requirements are in the section [When to register with Ofsted](#).

View a case study about [working with a PVI partner to deliver a free school breakfast club](#).

Off-school-site provision

If a school determines that providing the free breakfast club on its own site may not be the most suitable option for its setting or community, it can:

- partner with other nearby schools
- work with a PVI childcare provider to run the breakfast club from a different location within the vicinity of the school

Benefits of this model can be:

- support for schools that do not have sufficient workforce to run standalone provision

- support for schools that do not have sufficient space to run provision alone
- sharing best practice with nearby schools
- providing opportunities for pupils to socialise with pupils of nearby school and increase confidence

When running a club in partnership with another school, schools will need to:

- ensure the minimum expectations are met
- comply with other existing statutory guidance, non-statutory guidance and statutory obligations

For any off-site provision, schools will want to make sure that the:

- school or space is within the vicinity of the school
- pupils are safely escorted from the nearby school or site to the school in a timely manner
- nearby school or off-site space meets all the needs of the breakfast club
- model remains convenient for parents and carers
- provision is suitable for long-term use

Schools should seek advice from their local authority if they would like to:

- create a partnership model with other schools
- find a PVI childcare provider who can manage the breakfast club programme

Off-site options could include:

- community centres
- church halls or places of worship
- libraries with meeting rooms
- scout huts or youth clubs
- family and children centres

Find out more from the case study on [working with a PVI partner to deliver a free school breakfast club](#).

More information on off-school-site provision is available in the section on [Premises considerations](#).

Procurement support

The [buying for schools service](#) has free support for schools in buying goods or services.

The service aims to support schools and trusts to buy goods and services compliantly and get good value in terms of cost, quality and time.

Creating inclusive provision

Schools should make free breakfast clubs inclusive and accessible for all children at the club.

They should consider how to encourage attendance among children who:

- are vulnerable to food poverty and hunger
- require extra support in areas such as attendance, behaviour, or wellbeing
- have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

When deciding how to deliver free breakfast clubs, schools should consider the individual needs of children at their school who will be accessing the provision. When working with other providers, schools should consider whether the club is inclusive and appropriate for the needs of the children at their school.

Under the [Equality Act 2010](#), schools must make reasonable adjustments for children with disabilities. If a child with disabilities requires a reasonable adjustment to attend the breakfast club, the school must pay for it, not parents and carers.

When deciding whether an adjustment is reasonable, schools should consider:

- whether the adjustment is essential in enabling a child equal access to the same provision as their peers
- its practicality
- the affordability of any one-off or ongoing costs

To make sure the breakfast club programme is inclusive, schools should consider:

- having an appropriate offer for children with SEND
- making sure all staff are appropriately trained to deliver high quality, accessible and inclusive provision
- ensuring the arrangements for free breakfast clubs are suitable and safe where children have specific support needs, for example specified in an education, health and care plan
- providing food choices that take account of cultural, religious, and specific dietary and sensory needs
- having a plan to ensure schools can identify the needs of children with SEND
- speaking to families regularly to understand individual needs and how these may change
- which transport arrangements may be necessary

DfE's interactive [toolkit for creating inclusive provision](#) is for providers of wraparound childcare, free breakfast clubs and holiday activities and food programmes. It was developed in partnership with Mott MacDonald and Nasen.

Through the early adopter scheme, we have seen strong evidence of the effectiveness of free breakfast clubs in mainstream settings, including the benefits to pupils, their families and schools.

The early adopter scheme has also:

- shown that free breakfast clubs can be set up in special schools and alternative provision settings with strong benefits to children
- provided evidence about the specific challenges that exist for these schools

We will continue to work with all schools including special schools and alternative provision settings to learn how free breakfast clubs can best meet the needs of pupils and their families.

Staffing

School leaders should identify the free breakfast club staffing model that best aligns with the needs of children, their families and school staff, especially for those children who:

- are vulnerable to food poverty and hunger
- require extra support in areas such as attendance, behaviour, or wellbeing

For some schools, this could be an expansion of pre-existing provision or working with a PVI childcare provider to manage and find staff for the club (including food provision) on their behalf.

Alternatively, schools could consider adopting a mixed-model approach, combining school-led and externally managed provision.

For instance, a school might run part of the free breakfast club using its own staff and facilities, while partnering with a PVI childcare provider to support staffing, lead activities, or manage food provision.

Using a hybrid model can help expand capacity and enable delivery to a larger number of children. Free breakfast clubs can be facilitated by various individuals, including:

- teaching assistants
- school catering staff
- teachers
- volunteers
- others specifically hired to deliver the role

Breakfast club leaders should use their judgement to identify the most appropriate people to deliver free breakfast clubs, depending on:

- their school's context
- their existing staff contracts and arrangements
- the mix of skills and experience required
- the overall workload for groups of staff

Schools should also ensure that staff caring for children with SEND are appropriately trained.

Through the early adopter scheme, we are gaining valuable insights into the innovative solutions being implemented across the sector. This learning will be shared to support other schools as they begin their own provision. We will continue to collaborate with the sector to identify and implement effective strategies that address workforce challenges and strengthen delivery.

DfE's [workforce toolkit](#) is designed to support those involved in delivering free breakfast clubs and wraparound childcare, including local authorities, schools (including early adopter schools offering free breakfast clubs) and PVI childcare providers.

The toolkit contains a variety of practical resources, such as tools, templates, and tips, to aid recruitment and retention in free breakfast clubs and wraparound childcare settings.

Schools should:

- consider whether they work with other organisations to run their provision, including PVI childcare providers and childminders, who may be able to work on non-domestic premises
- consider whether they use supply staff or temporary workers to help run their breakfast club programme where needed
- exercise financial prudence when taking on additional staff and seek the best rates available
- consider compressed hours or flexible working for existing staff members
- consider using the DfE and Crown Commercial Service agency supply deal if hiring agency workers
- consider whether the [school resource management adviser programme](#) can support delivery of the breakfast club programme

The [Improve workload and wellbeing for school staff](#) has tools and resources designed by school leaders for school leaders, to help schools adopt more streamlined practices and save time for staff.

Schools can find more information about with a school that has worked with a PVI childcare provider to support with staffing their breakfast clubs in the [KOOSA Kids breakfast club at Hook Infant School case study](#).

Staff training and qualifications

School leaders are responsible for considering the staff qualification and training requirements if running free breakfast clubs. While there are no specific staff qualification requirements for free breakfast clubs for school-aged children, leaders should consider whether staff training is beneficial to ensure the needs of children

attending provision are met.

The staff-to-child ratios depend on the age of the children and the qualification levels of staff. Staffing arrangements must meet the needs of all children and ensure their safety. Schools and providers must ensure that children are adequately supervised, especially while eating, and decide how to use staff to ensure children's needs are met.

When EYFS children are eating there should always be a member of staff in the room. The staff member must have a valid paediatric first aid certificate for a full course, consistent with the criteria set out in Annex A of the [EYFS statutory framework](#).

Food hygiene

If staff are handling food, they should be adequately trained in food hygiene and allergy management.

It is not a legal requirement to hold a food hygiene certificate, but training, e-learning and other formal courses can be useful to ensure that an adequate and verifiable level has been achieved by staff.

Find out more from [Starting your food business safely](#).

Local authority food safety teams will be able to advise on which course is most suitable. [Contact a food safety team](#) for information.

Additional training

Schools may wish to consider additional training options for their staff, such as apprenticeships, and speaking to their local authority lead who may have training programmes available, ranging from safeguarding to play work.

The workforce toolkit provides a list of training providers and resources that schools may find useful.

To ensure minimum safe standards are in place, irrespective of the age range of children they care for:

- PVI childcare providers must be registered with Ofsted
- childminders must be registered with Ofsted or a childminder agency

This is part of the programme grant conditions.

Information about the different registration requirements are in the section [When to](#)

[register with Ofsted](#).

Premises considerations

Schools have the flexibility to decide how and where to set up their breakfast club provision, in accordance with the minimum requirements.

Schools are expected to consider all space available on-site to deliver provision including classrooms. Alternatively, they can opt to offer the provision off-site at a nearby venue. Find out more from the section on [provision of free breakfast clubs](#).

Schools have the option to provide free breakfast clubs on-site, hosting the club in one or more existing spaces within their premises such as:

- communal, assembly and dining halls
- classrooms used for teaching
- unused classrooms
- non-teaching areas
- library and resource areas

DfE recognises that schools face competing demands on the use of their estate and that school leaders already purposefully maximise the use of their spaces to deliver childcare provision.

It is anticipated that free breakfast clubs can be delivered within the school's existing spaces given their early start time, before the lessons begin.

Other spaces within the school site may also be utilised as part of the delivery of the free breakfast club. DfE would encourage schools to consider how external provision can be used to deliver free breakfast clubs. This may include the use of covered areas, playgrounds and fields.

There is more information on classroom delivery models in the [Silver Springs case study](#).

Schools may need to engage with responsible bodies and third parties such as private financial initiative (PFI) providers, trusts, governing bodies and dioceses.

In some cases, delivery of provision may influence the current agreed use or

management of estate on the land and the responsible body may need to get appropriate permission.

Breakfast club provision should be planned as part of the wider long term estate strategy. [Good estate management for schools](#) has more information.

Evidence from the early adopter scheme highlights the wider benefits of free breakfast clubs, which extend beyond the provision itself.

Schools have found that:

- rethinking how space is used to accommodate free breakfast clubs, can add significant value to the benefits of the free club for pupils
- innovative use of existing space can enhance opportunities for play and socialising with friends as well as for outdoor play

These changes not only support the delivery of wraparound childcare but also enhance the overall functionality and efficiency of the school environment.

Schools will need to determine whether there are any associated safeguarding or management requirements that may affect access or space zoning arrangements.

Statutory requirements

Schools must meet all statutory requirements in relation to their estate including:

- [Keeping children safe in education](#)
- [Working together to safeguard children](#)
- EYFS, including space requirements
- the compulsory part of the general childcare register requirements
- health and safety in the workplace
- fire safety
- environmental building and grounds
- acoustics
- hygiene standards

Engaging parents and carers

Schools should ensure that parents and carers are aware that there is a free breakfast club which all children can attend, regardless of need.

They should also ensure that parents are made aware of the positive impact breakfast clubs have on pupils, including:

- improvements to behaviour and attainment
- providing a calm environment that ensures a readiness to learn at the start of the day

Schools should consider how to work with parents to encourage sustained take-up among children who:

- are vulnerable to food poverty and hunger
- require extra support in areas such as attendance, behaviour, or wellbeing

Early adopter schools report that parents need to hear and understand:

- that the breakfast club is free and available to all pupils
- how the breakfast club fits with other before and after school paid-for offers

Schools should consider:

- sharing details about the club and how it is run, including any activities and any costs (if offering a club for more than 30 minutes)
- being clear about how the club will interact with an existing paid-for offer, if necessary
- asking for their feedback on the activities at the club and what else they might find useful
- finding out what support parents, carers and others in the local community can offer, like running activities or volunteering
- sharing highlights and successes with parents and carers, such as the benefits to children that attend

To communicate these messages and promote the ways in which attendance is beneficial to children, schools could consider:

- a regular newsletter or mail-outs
- updating school website or social media
- using a noticeboard
- provide leaflets or posters
- sharing details of the club with local authorities

Booking systems

Schools should consider whether parents need to book in advance for their children to attend a free breakfast club. Booking systems should not act as a barrier to access a free breakfast club, and schools cannot use them to:

- limit the number of places available
- manage a staggered expansion in the number of places

If a school decides to use a booking system, there should be:

- a reasonable sign-up period to allow parents and carers to book onto the breakfast club
- clear instructions communicated to parents and carers explaining how to use the booking system

Schools should:

- track patterns in the numbers booked on compared to actual attendance
- use their own judgement to ensure that they are maximising accessibility and balancing the practicalities of delivery – this may mean restricting access where a child has not booked

Schools are encouraged to allow some flexibility in exceptional circumstances.

Transport

It is the responsibility of parents and carers to drop off children to free breakfast clubs or make alternative transport arrangements.

As set out in the [home-to-school travel guidance](#), children will only be eligible for free home-to-school transport to get to school for the beginning of the school day and to return home at the end of the school day, provided they meet the eligibility criteria.

Local authorities are not required to make travel arrangements to enable eligible children to attend free breakfast clubs, but schools should work with local authorities to find solutions where possible.

Role of trustees and the governing board

The strategic oversight of a free breakfast club can be incorporated into trustees and governing board's responsibilities. It should be accessible to all alongside any existing breakfast or wraparound provision.

Governors and trustees should ensure they maintain a balance between strategic oversight and avoiding involvement in operational roles.

The governing body and academy trustees also have a responsibility to ensure compliance with the school food standards.

The governing body may wish to ask the headteacher or executive leader for evidence that the school or academy's breakfast offer is compliant with the standards.

DfE and the National Governance Association have a free, online training course on school food for governors and trustees. [A whole-school approach to food](#) aims to:

- improve understanding of the School Food Standards
- give governing boards confidence to hold their school leaders to account

When to register with Ofsted

Free breakfast club provided directly by the school

Schools will not need to register their breakfast club programme with Ofsted if:

- they are offering it directly as part of their school's activities
- they employ the staff working in the breakfast club
- there is at least one registered pupil of the school attending

In this scenario, the breakfast club will fall under the Ofsted education inspection framework and Ofsted may observe pupils at the breakfast club as part of the school inspection.

[Registering school-based childcare provision](#) has more information about the requirements for schools providing childcare, including free breakfast clubs.

Provision by a PVI childcare provider or childminder

To ensure minimum safe standards are in place, the PVI childcare provider or childminder must be registered with Ofsted as part of the programme grant conditions.

For PVI childcare providers, the type of registration will be dependent on the age range of children attending the breakfast club. For childminders and providers of childcare on domestic premises, registration must be with Ofsted or a childminder agency.

[Childminders and childcare providers: register with Ofsted](#) has more information.

If schools are working with a PVI childcare provider or childminder, they should:

- check providers have appropriate registrations in place
- ensure providers the school is working with are following the requirements of the EYFS framework or childcare register, depending on the age of the children being cared for

If schools have concerns about a PVI childcare provider or childminder not meeting Ofsted standards, as set out in EYFS or the childcare register, they should contact their local authority or Ofsted directly. Ofsted inform local authorities of all Ofsted inspection grades.

Safeguarding and health and safety

Schools should have regard to the safeguarding and health and safety section of [wraparound childcare guidance for schools](#).

Schools in England must have regard to the statutory guidance [keeping children safe in education](#) when carrying out their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Free breakfast clubs may include children who attend reception class during the school day.

Schools should comply with the safeguarding and welfare requirements as set out in section 3 of the [EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers](#) in relation to reception-age pupils. Schools should also ensure they are up to date with changes to the EYFS.

The EYFS also includes requirements on safer eating including:

- ensuring there is someone with a valid paediatric first aid certificate in the room when children are eating
- ensuring awareness of how to prepare food for children to prevent choking
- requirements around understanding and managing allergies

Schools should:

- make sure all staff receive safeguarding training and that they know the identity of the designated safeguarding lead (or deputies) and how to contact them
- make sure all staff, including volunteers, have an enhanced disclosure and barring service (DBS) check

PVI childcare providers and childminders funded through the free breakfast clubs programme must be registered with Ofsted. They must follow the safeguarding and health and safety requirements set out in the:

- [EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers](#)
- childcare register for [childminders and childcare providers](#) – subject to the age range of children being cared for

Schools and PVI providers should remind themselves of their health and safety obligations under relevant legislation when operating their breakfast club provision.

DfE's guidance [health and safety: responsibilities and duties for schools](#) has more information.

Children with medical conditions

Schools and PVI providers will also want to assure themselves that children with medical conditions attending their breakfast club provision are properly supported.

DfE's guidance [supporting pupils with medical conditions at school](#) outlines practical steps to help schools meet their statutory responsibilities and promote the wellbeing of these pupils. It will also be useful for PVI childcare providers.

Requirements for a high-quality food offer

Having a nutritious, balanced breakfast can help children get the energy they need to start the school day. We know that many schools already offer breakfast provision and that pupils enjoy eating with their peers before the school day begins.

Food served at breakfast will need to be compliant with the [school food standards practical guide](#).

These food-based standards specify which types of food should be served at school and how often.

The standards define the foods and drinks that:

- must be provided
- are restricted
- must not be provided

They apply to food and drink provided to pupils on school premises and during an extended school day (up to 6pm), including, breakfast clubs.

[School food standards: resources for schools](#) has a checklist for school food other than at lunch. This sets out what should and should not be served across the school

day, including at free breakfast clubs.

For reception year pupils, schools must also follow the:

- EFYS statutory framework
- EYFS nutrition guidance, unless there is good reason not to

This allows flexibility in instances where implementing the EYFS nutrition guidance may be more difficult, for example, for reception year pupils in schools where they must follow the school food standards.

Head teachers and school leaders will know how to apply the standards to ensure children have a healthy lunch while at school. For the breakfast offer, there are tips and advice on how to provide a healthy breakfast within the existing guidance.

It's important to provide a wide range of foods across the week, ensuring foods are low in saturated fat, sugar and high in fibre to:

- ensure that food provided to children in school is nutritious and of high quality
- promote good nutritional health in all pupils
- support those who are nutritionally vulnerable
- support or promote a positive relationship with food

[Breakfast Bistro at Carr Mill Primary School](#) is a case study example of how the offer may work.

Breakfast examples

Starchy carbohydrates

These are recommended to form the basis of the breakfast offer. Try to offer a variety across the week. Examples include:

- wheat biscuits
- shredded wholewheat
- unsweetened puffed wheat
- no added sugar muesli
- plain porridge

- corn flakes
- rice pops
- higher fibre bread such as wholemeal and higher fibre white breads, fruit breads and crumpets

Low sugar, higher fibre cereals

Choose breakfast cereals with the lowest sugar content which are labelled as low (green on the front of pack nutrition label) in total sugar. No added sugar mueslis will not be green on the label because of the dried fruit, but these are still good to serve.

Sugar should not be available for adding to cereals.

Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables must be made available as part of the breakfast offer. These can be included in a variety of ways including:

- fresh
- dried fruit (with no added sugar) or canned in juice (not syrup) served with cereal, bread or yoghurt
- cooked mushrooms, tomatoes or baked beans (reduced sugar and salt) if schools opt for a hot breakfast offer

Aim to offer a variety of fruit or vegetables across the week.

Lower fat and lower sugar dairy

Dairy or plant-based products and foods can be served. This could be:

- a glass of semi-skimmed milk or plant-based drinks such as soya and oat
- milk or plant-based products provided for cereal
- lower fat no added sugar yoghurt or plant-based yoghurts

Fresh drinking water

Water should be readily available for children to drink during the breakfast club.

Foods high in fat, salt and sugar

These items are not permitted under the standards and must be avoided. This includes items such as:

- packaged cereal bars
- processed fruit bars

- pre-packaged croissants
- chocolate and chocolate coated products and confectionery

Food and drink to limit

Processed meat products such as sausages and bacon can only be served once a week in primary schools. This applies across the whole school day.

Pastry and deep-fried products can be served no more than twice a week. This applies across the whole school day.

Condiments and table sauces can only be served in portion sizes of:

- no more than 10g packets
- one teaspoonful

Sweet spreads should be reduced sugar and be served in portion sizes of:

- 20g packets
- one teaspoon

Procurement of food

Schools can choose how to source and deliver food as best meets their needs and in accordance with relevant public procurement legislation. There are a number of models that schools can consider, such as:

- sourcing food directly from suppliers, including breakfast club providers, partners or supermarkets or using an existing food supply contract
- utilising an existing catering contract or putting in place a new catering contract with a local authority or private catering company
- using a buying framework including from a public buying organisation or consortia

Schools may wish to use the [sustainable procurement: the government buying standards](#) for advice around sustainable sourcing.

Local authority catering services may also be able to support schools with delivery, potentially by varying existing lunch contracts to include breakfast provision.

Schools using a catering company or external provider to deliver the food aspect of their breakfast club will want to check that the company they are using is registered as a food business operator. This means they will receive a food hygiene rating and be inspected by Food Safety Officers at regular intervals.

It is important that schools use reputable suppliers to supply and handle food safety.

Schools that do not have food business operator registration and choose to deliver the food offer using their own staff will need to register separately from other operators.

[Food business registration](#) has more information. The Food Standards Agency also have helpful guidance for food business operators in [starting your food business safely](#).

Legal requirements and guidance for schools and caterers

The [Requirements for School Food Regulations 2014](#) sets out the mandatory standards for food served in schools at lunch and other than at lunch, including free breakfast clubs.

Under [section 100 of the Children and Families Act 2014](#), schools have a duty to support pupils with medical conditions.

[Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions](#) explains schools responsibilities. This includes making sure that a child with an allergy is able to eat breakfast at school. Schools should also use the existing [allergy guidance for schools](#) for further advice on supporting children with allergies.

The [Food Information Regulations 2014](#) require all food businesses, including school caterers, to show allergen ingredients information for the food they serve. This makes it easier for schools to identify the food that pupils with allergies can and cannot eat.

The food information regulations include requirements for the labelling of allergens on prepacked for direct sale (PPDS) foods. These are foods that are packaged on

the premises before the consumer orders them. The Food Standards Agency's [advice for schools, colleges and nurseries](#) has more information.

For schools who have reception aged pupils, schools will also need to follow the safeguarding and welfare requirements as set out in section 3 of the [EYFS statutory framework](#).

Support for schools and trusts

DfE support

Support for schools launching free breakfast clubs will be available throughout the programme to ensure that schools are set up for success and have confidence to deliver.

A 3-tier support offer is available which reflects feedback gathered from the early adopter scheme.

Tier 1: self-service support

Self-service support materials, such as the breakfast club's delivery blueprint are available. This will help schools to understand breakfast club expectations, funding, and allow access practical tools to support delivery.

All schools are encouraged to use the delivery blueprint in developing their offer. It provides:

- templates
- guidance and suggestions for delivery models
- signposting to existing resources
- case studies at each stage of a school's journey from preparing for, to implementing the policy

Tier 2

If the self-service support offer does not address a school's support needs, the school can:

- get in touch with DfE
- seek further help through their local peer-to-peer learning network

All schools will be assigned peer support upon launching their breakfast club to share problem-solving approaches and facilitate learning.

Tier 3

Schools can apply for 1:1 bespoke support. This is for schools:

- who are experiencing substantial challenges that risk their ability to meet the minimum requirements
- whose support needs have not been addressed through other channels

DfE envisages support evolving as schools move through the programme. This is set out in the following phases.

Engage (at least 1 term before delivery)

Schools will have access to:

- self-service support and will begin to consider how they might deliver against the minimum requirements
- case studies to see what models have worked for schools with similar characteristics

Prepare (1 term before delivery)

Schools will:

- begin to plan their breakfast club and will be able to access all tiers of the support offer, including bespoke 1:1 support
- be able to attend a peer-to-peer support network to discuss proposed models and navigate any potential barriers

Implement (term 1 of delivery)

Schools will begin to deliver, assisted by the full support offer, including peer support from within their networks.

Embed (term 2 of delivery)

Schools can access training within the support offer to embed and improve their breakfast club offer, making changes as necessary to refine the breakfast club.

Business as usual (term 3 of delivery)

Schools integrate free breakfast clubs into their business-as-usual practices.

Sponsorship

DfE are partnering with 4 food providers who are supporting the early adopter, free breakfast clubs in a test and learn phase until July 2026. The partners are Magic Breakfast, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, and Tesco. Offers range from free delivery to discounted breakfast products. DfE will keep schools updated on further plans for 2026 and beyond.

Role of local authorities

Local authorities are well placed to support schools to set up and run free breakfast clubs. They have a [statutory duty](#) to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, enough childcare places within their area for children aged 0 to 14 (or up to 18 for disabled children) to meet the needs of parents to enable them to work or undertake education or training that might help them to obtain work.

New, free breakfast clubs will help in provision of this wider wraparound childcare offer for primary school aged children.

Local authorities also have significant experience of supporting schools to set up and expand before and after school care, including breakfast clubs, through the wraparound childcare programme.

New local authority capacity funding

DfE will be providing over £10 million of funding, across local authorities, for dedicated administrative capacity in the 2026 to 2027 financial year.

This is to enable local authorities to support:

- parents to work and children to achieve and thrive
- schools and providers with the national rollout of free breakfast clubs

Local authorities have existing support offers for schools and childcare providers to

secure sufficient childcare for their local area. Schools should work collaboratively with their local authority, in line with the expectations on wraparound childcare.

Schools are:

- encouraged to contact their local authority to explore what support their local authority can offer to help establish or adapt their breakfast club programme to meet expectations
- expected to work with their local authority to ensure free breakfast clubs do not:
 - reduce the availability of childcare for working families
 - displace existing provision
- expected to support their local authority to understand demand for childcare, and the childcare available at their school
- encouraged to make use of existing local authority support on food procurement, where this is in place

Local authority support

Examples of the support local authorities may be able to offer include:

- supporting the development of delivery models which build upon and complement existing local provision and address delivery barriers
- meeting the needs of children with SEND, vulnerable and disadvantaged children
- developing partnerships across schools, trusts and PVI childcare providers
- planning for delivery, including workforce considerations, advising on safeguarding, Ofsted and quality of provision

Local authorities should also ensure that information about free breakfast clubs in their area is:

- accessible to parents and carers
- included in existing communications on early years and school-aged childcare on their Family Information Service or equivalent local authority website – this should include a list of schools actively enrolled on the free breakfast clubs programme

Local authorities may want to consider how they ensure schools in their area are

meeting the requirements of the programme and the needs of children and families. This could include organising visits to schools on the programme at regular intervals to inspect the availability, accessibility, inclusivity, and quality of provision.

Although they are not responsible for the delivery of free breakfast clubs, local authorities should:

- take the availability of free breakfast clubs into consideration when determining whether there is sufficient childcare for working parents in their area
- work with schools to ensure free breakfast clubs do not reduce the availability of childcare for working families or displace existing provision that's meeting the needs of children and families

The [national wraparound childcare handbook](#) has examples of the support local authorities may be able to offer schools.

Grant conditions

Guidance on the [free breakfast clubs grant: 2025 to 2026 academic year](#) is available. This has information on the requirements of grant recipients, including providing data through online forms. The data must be returned to DfE within the given timeframe.

Recipients will also be expected to participate in the monitoring and evaluation of the programme, including:

- attending focus groups and interviews to share views and experiences
- completing surveys at regularly intervals on implementation and delivery
- receiving visits from researchers and DfE officials
- providing any other data or additional insights which may assist in monitoring and evaluating the programme, including parent views, such as through surveys and hosting focus groups and pupil-level data

Contact us

DfE will support schools in delivering free breakfast clubs. If schools have any questions about guidance, implementation, or requirements, contact us through the [customer help portal](#).

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