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Guidance

Universal infant free school meals (UIFSM): conditions of grant 2025 to 2026

Updated 25 June 2026

Applies to England

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1. Introduction

We will pay the universal infant free school meals (UFSM) grant 2025 to 2026 under Section 14 of the Education Act 2002. Under section 16 of that act, the Secretary of State lays down the following terms and conditions on which we give assistance in relation to the UFSM grant payable to schools and local authorities for the financial year beginning 1 April 2024.

2. Funding rates and allocations

It has now been confirmed that a further uplift to £2.61 will be implemented for the 2025 to 2026 academic year.

As such, each meal taken by an eligible pupil now attracts £2.61. An allocation assumes that pupils will take 190 school meals over an academic year, providing £495.90 per eligible pupil, as counted below.

2.1 Provisional allocation

For the academic year 2025 to 2026, we will make a provisional allocation to schools that is the total number of eligible meals taken in 2024 to 2025 multiplied by £2.61 x 190 days and by seven-twelfths.

2.2 Final allocation

We calculate a final allocation for academic year 2025 to 2026 in June 2026 using the number of pupils recorded as taking a meal in year 1 and year 2 in the October 2025, and January 2026, school censuses.

We then subtract those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (FSM) in the same censuses, who are taking a meal. This figure is then divided by 2 to give the average number of eligible UFSM pupils in years 1 and 2.

The number of reception pupils used will be **the greater of either:**

- the number of pupils recorded as taking a meal in the October 2025 and January 2026 school censuses, minus those pupils taking a meal known to be eligible for FSM in the same censuses, divided by 2 (this gives the average number of eligible UIFSM pupils in reception for academic year 2025 to 2026) **or**
- the number of pupils recorded as taking a meal in January 2026 school censuses, minus those pupils taking a meal known to be eligible for FSM in the same census

We will count dual registered pupils where they took their meal on the census days, even if it is their subsidiary setting.

Where a school **does not** record pupils in year groups, we will use those aged 4, 5, or 6, on the relevant school censuses to calculate the allocations.

We include pupils on the alternative provision census placed in independent schools in the provisional and final allocations to local authorities.

3. Allocations to schools

The Department for Education (DfE) pays the UIFSM grant directly to academies and free schools open on or before 1 May 2025.

Local authorities must allocate the amounts set out in the attached schedule of allocations to each maintained school, and any that convert to academy status after 1 May 2025; they cannot hold the grant centrally.

A school may agree to use their UIFSM grant allocation to contribute to central local authority provision, but local authorities must allocate the grant to each school to enable them to make that decision.

We allocate the grant to schools federated, or to be federated, under the provisions of Section 24 of the Education Act 2002, during the financial year beginning 1 April 2025 as if they were not federated.

In the case of **a school which closes before 1 September 2025**, the local authority should not allocate the grant to the school.

In the case of **a school which closes between 1 September 2025 and 31 August 2026**, the local authority will allocate the grant for the proportion of that period that the school is open.

A school which opens between 1 September 2025 and 31 August 2026, and receives all the pupils from 2, or more, schools which have closed, will receive a grant equal to the total which would be payable to the schools had they remained open. The grant will be proportionate to the period of 1 September 2025 to 31 March 2026, for which the school is open.

Where **a school has pupils transferred from a closing school during the period 1 September 2025 to 31 August 2026**, the local authority should allocate the grant that would have been paid to the closing school, had it remained open, to the school receiving those pupils; the school should agree the amount allocated.

The grant is payable irrespective of the existence of any deficit relating to the expenditure of the school's budget share. UIFSM grant is not part of schools' budget shares and is not part of the individual school's budget. It is not included in the minimum funding guarantee calculations.

4. Terms on which UIFSM is allocated to schools

The grant supports schools in delivering the legal requirement to offer free school meals, meeting the school food standards, to all their reception, year 1 and year 2 pupils. Subject to meeting this legal duty, schools may spend the grant for the purposes of the school; that is to say for the educational benefit of pupils registered at that school, or for the benefit of pupils registered at other schools.

They may also spend it on community facilities, for example services whose provision furthers any charitable purpose for the benefit of pupils at the school or their families, or people who live or work in the school's locality.

Schools do not have to spend the entire grant in the financial year beginning 1 April 2025; they may carry forward some or all of the grant.

5. Alternative provision pupils

We will allocate the UIFSM grant to local authorities for each pupil recorded as aged 4, 5, and 6, on the January 2025 census, who is not recorded as eligible for a free

school meal, and where the local authority placed the pupil in an independent school.

The local authority should spend the amount allocated for such pupils by the end of the academic year 2025 to 2026. They can only spend it on providing a free school meal to pupils not recorded as eligible for a free school meal, and aged 4, 5, and 6.

6. Payment arrangements

The Secretary of State will pay the grant to local authorities as follows:

Month	Proportion of grant
June 2025	Seven-twelfths of each school’s provisional allocation. Schools that were academies on 1 May 2025 will receive their UIFSM grant direct from DfE in July 2025.
June 2026	The final allocation for each maintained school as at 1 June 2026, minus the amount of the allocation paid in June 2025. Any school that converts to academy status after 1 June 2025, and by 1 June 2026, will receive the rest of its allocation direct from DfE in July 2026.

Non-converter academies and free schools, which open after 1 April 2025, and by 31 August 2026, will receive their grant direct from DfE.

Where a school’s final allocation is less than the provisional payment made in June 2025, we will deduct the difference from grant payment in June 2026.

7. Certification

Local authorities must certify that they have passed on the correct amount of funding to schools or, where they have spent funding centrally, that they have spent it in line with the conditions of grant. We will issue a certification form in April 2026.

8. Variation

The Secretary of State may vary the basis for the allocation from those set out above, if the school or local authority requests it.

9. Overpayments

Any overpayment of grant must be repaid to the Secretary of State.

10. Further information

The Secretary of State, and the Comptroller and Auditor General, may inspect the books, records and other documents that relate the recipient's accounts. Under Section 6 of the National Audit Act 1983, the Comptroller and Auditor General may examine whether the authority or school spent the premium in an efficient and cost-effective way.

The recipient should provide any information the Secretary of State requires in order determine whether the authority or school has complied with the conditions in this guidance.

11. Other conditions

The Secretary of State may require the repayment of the whole or any part of the grant if the authority or school fails to follow the conditions in this guidance.

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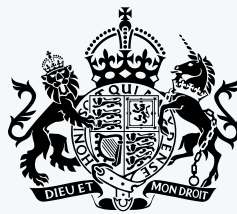
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