



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

GUIDANCE

# Catering and free school meals (COVID-19)

Information for schools on catering operations and the provision of free school meals.

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## Catering and free school meals

The Welsh Government will continue to make funding available to local authorities so that they can make free school meal provision to eligible learners who are not required to attend school premises because they are self-isolating as a result of COVID-19. Local authorities are able to claim from the Welsh Government’s Local Government Hardship Fund.

This will include situations where learners have tested positive for COVID-19 and where learners are self-isolating whilst awaiting test results. We are also aware that some schools/local authorities have had to request that whole classes and/or year groups stay at home due to shortages of teaching staff related to COVID-19. In this situation, additional costs incurred in making provision in lieu of free school meals to eligible learners can also be claimed from the Welsh Government’s Local Government Hardship Fund.

Funding will be made available at the rate of £19.50 per learner per week (or £3.90 per day) in order that local authorities can continue to make provision for learners who are eligible for free school meals but who are unable to attend

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because of COVID-19 (i.e. if they are self-isolating). Local authorities can choose which method of provision best suits the needs of their communities (options include food parcels, supermarket vouchers or direct payments to parents'/carers' bank accounts) and we encourage local authorities to consider operating a number of systems in parallel in order to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable families can be met.

The funding made available is based on the assumption that local authorities will, where possible, meet the first £2.50 per learner per day (£12.50 per week) of any costs incurred, with the Welsh Government paying costs in excess of this amount up to a maximum of £1.40 per learner per day or £7.00 per week. Local authorities are reminded to guard against double funding.

However, the Welsh Government is aware that local authorities will have fixed costs associated with the provision of free school meals. On this basis the Welsh Government accepts that the majority of the budgets for free school meals are likely to be committed. In these instances the local authority may experience difficulties in meeting our expectation that they will meet the first £2.50 per learner per day cost. In these cases we would expect local authorities to investigate if savings have been made in school catering budgets. If this is not possible, and where local authorities can demonstrate that no further budgetary offset is possible, then we will make reasonable exceptions and will pay in excess of £1.40 per learner per day. Local authorities are reminded that they will need to demonstrate that the arrangements they have put in place for the provision in lieu of free school meals represent the best possible value for money, taking account of any health and safety restrictions.

## **Catering provision for children attending school**

The Welsh Government's expectation is that school or local authority catering provision will revert to its pre-COVID arrangements, unless there are exceptional circumstances which might prevent this. Learners who are eligible for free school meals who are or transitionally protected should be provided with a free meal on each day they attend. Other learners will still be expected to pay for their meals.

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## Special diets

Whether catering is provided in schools or if you chose to deliver food to pupils you will need to ensure that pupils with special diets or allergies are catered for. Care needs to be taken to check with families whether any pupils have allergies or special diets before food is issued to them.

## Compliance with “The Healthy Eating in Schools (Nutritional Standards and Requirements) (Wales) Regulations 2013”

The Welsh Government’s expectation is that schools and local authorities will comply with the Healthy Eating in Schools Regulations, now that schools have returned to pre-COVID arrangements.

## Free breakfasts in primary schools

The Welsh Government expects that breakfast clubs should operate as normal, unless it would be unreasonable for them to do so. We would remind local authorities that they are still under the same legal duty to provide a free school breakfast (section 88 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013). The Welsh Government has produced [guidance on the provision of free breakfasts in primary schools](#).

Local authorities are encouraged to discuss any decision not to re-open a breakfast club with their legal advisors. They are also encouraged to communicate decisions and the reasons for taking them with parents as soon as they can.

## About this document

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