



Friday 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022

Dear Parents and Carers,

### **Take Up of Free School Meals**

Figures from January show 22.5% of pupils now qualify for Free School Meals, up from 20.8% in 2021 and 13.6% in 2018. In the North East this figure is even higher at 27.5%. This is the highest rate in the country.

This is a dramatic increase and given the current cost of living crisis, unfortunately this number will continue to rise.

### **I think I'm eligible - what do I need to do?**

If you think your circumstances have changed or you have not checked to see if you are eligible - here's what to do:

1. First, check if you qualify – it is not just if you are unemployed, so please look at the eligibility list below.

*Your child may be able to get free school meals if you receive any of the following:*

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit - if you apply on or after 1 April 2018 your household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you get)

2. Registering is really quick and easy, you can either apply online at

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/2204/Free-school-meals>

3. If you are unable to complete the form, pop into the school and someone in the office team can support you, we will treat your application in the strictest confidence. No one will know you have registered and it will not affect any other benefits you are claiming.

### **How it works in school**

Those children that are eligible for free school meals have their accounts credited daily so students can purchase their meals alongside friends. Those entitled to them are treated with the strictest confidence.



Just so you know, Aspens, our catering provider, offers a wide range of food for mid morning break and for lunch time including a number of meal deals. As well as the main traditional meal and pudding, they sell pasta with a range of toppings, jackets with fillings, hot wraps and a range of sandwiches and paninis to eat in or grab & go. Take a look below:

### **Using their entitlement**

We are seeing some students who are entitled to free school meals choosing not to use all of their allowance or buy lunch at all. If this applies to your household, please encourage your child to use their allowance each day to buy a healthy meal at lunchtime. Evidence is clear that this will set them up for the rest of the day and aid their learning throughout too. Please don't let them miss out.

If you have any questions regarding the catering please contact: [info@aspens-services.com](mailto:info@aspens-services.com)

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamie Engineer', written in a cursive style.

Jamie Engineer

Senior Deputy Headteacher