



# Free School Meals Why are they important?

Put simply: when children eat better, they do better

Whether families are paying for school meals or are entitled to them for free, the benefits of choosing school meals are numerous. School food has to meet high nutritional standards which guarantee children a healthy, balanced menu, and our research proves that when students eat better at lunchtime in a decent environment, they do better in the afternoon.

For children and young people, school meals contribute to the development of good food habits and eating a healthy balanced diet from an early age is critical for growth, development and engagement with healthier food.

With national figures<sup>7</sup> showing that around one in three children are either overweight or obese by the time they reach Year 6, the rising cost of obesity to the NHS and the fact that there are still many children for whom school lunch remains the only balanced meal they eat in a day, the value of healthy school food simply cannot be overestimated.

This year, with the introduction of the Pupil Premium and £600 for every child registered for free school meals, there is even more reason for schools to ensure that each child that qualifies is actually signed up. Even if just 10 more children registered for free school meals, your school would receive

£6,000 in Pupil Premium funding for you to use to support those children who need it most.

Research shows that children from low-income backgrounds are less likely to do well at school, continue into further education and secure higher paid jobs. We want to buck this worrying trend and to do that, we need to make sure all children are given the best start and that includes their right to a healthy, balanced diet.

Free school meals do matter, and we believe that it is vitally important that schools should do everything they can to ensure;

- a) that all children entitled to free school meals are registered for them
- b) that all registered children claim and eat their free meals

There should be no reason for children entitled to free school meals not to claim them.



## Free School Meals - The Figures

- **1.2 million** - the number of children in this country registered as eligible for free school meals<sup>1</sup>
- **20%** - the approximate percentage of children entitled to a free school meal but not registered to have one<sup>2</sup>
- **210,000** - the number of children registered for a free school meal that do not eat them<sup>3</sup>
- **€600** - the amount of Pupil Premium funding that each school will receive per registered child<sup>4</sup>
- **€350** - the amount of money that a parent could save per child through claiming their free school meal<sup>5</sup>
- **30.9%** - the percentage of fsm pupils that achieve a-c grades at GCSE compared to **58.5%** non fsm pupils<sup>6</sup>
- **6%** - the percentage of free school meal pupils that go on to 6th form compared to **40%** of non free school meal pupils<sup>6</sup>

**SCHOOL  
FOOD TRUST**  
Eat Better Do Better

1 DfE: Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics, January 2011.

2 Assessing Current and Potential Provision of Free School Meals; London Economics for the School Food Trust, 2008.

3 DfE: Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics, January 2011.

4 Dept for Education.

5 Average price of a school meal x 38 weeks.

6 DfE: GCSE and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England, 2009/10.

7 National Child Measurement Programme 2009/10.

