

Voucher scheme launches for schools providing free school meals

Children eligible for free school meals will benefit from a national voucher scheme allowing them to continue to access meals whilst they stay at home.

Schools can now provide every eligible child with a weekly shopping voucher worth £15 to spend at supermarkets while schools are closed due to coronavirus.

Schools can continue to provide meals for collection or delivery themselves, but where this is not possible, the scheme will allow schools to provide vouchers to families electronically, or as a gift card for those without internet access.

The vouchers can be spent on food at a range of shops including Sainsbury's, Tesco, Asda, Morrisons, Waitrose and M&S, with the Department working to get more shops to join the scheme as soon as possible.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

I recognise that the unprecedented action this Government is taking to protect the country from coronavirus, including closing schools, is dramatically affecting the lives of many families.

I want to thank schools for the support they are continuing to provide to families during such uncertain times.

No child should go hungry as a result of the measures introduced to keep people at home, protect the NHS and save lives. That's why we are launching this scheme to make sure children who usually benefit from free school meals still have access to healthy and nutritious meals while they are not attending school.

Parents will receive the voucher through their child's school, which can then be redeemed online via a code, or sent to their house as a gift card and used at supermarkets across the country.

This delivers on the Government's commitment to provide ongoing support for the 1.3 million children that would receive benefits-related free school meals at their school.

Today (Tuesday 31 March) schools will be emailed by the Department for Education's chosen supplier, Edenred. Schools will then either be able to:

1. Order vouchers individually online and have a code sent via email to each family. The family can then show the code on their phone at the supermarket; or

2. Arrange a bulk order of multiple codes and receive an excel spreadsheet to help schools organise sending on to a family, or create an eGift card for a preferred supermarket to be posted to a family if parents cannot get online.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT), said:

This is welcome news for schools and families. This new system fills in one of the remaining gaps in the complex jigsaw puzzle of provision that has arisen from the Covid-19 crisis. There may be some kinks to work out of the scheme, especially as it has been developed at pace, but at least there is some certainty available now.

The government has done the right thing by ensuring that vouchers can be used at a range of different shops, making it more practical for families to use the vouchers. Many schools had already developed their own schemes and local solutions, so it is good to see that they will be able to continue these if they're working well or adopt the new scheme if they feel that would be better. We'll be working with the government to make sure this system works as effectively as everyone hopes it will.

The total value of vouchers available per eligible child per week exceeds the rate paid to schools for free school meals, recognising that families will not be buying food in bulk and may therefore incur higher costs.

The Department for Education has also published new [guidance](#) on free school meals to help schools and parents prepare.

Mike Coupe, Sainsbury's Chief Executive, said:

Over the last few weeks we have been working closely with the government to get food to those who need it the most. We have introduced measures to support NHS workers, elderly and vulnerable customers and keep our customers and colleagues safe. We are proud to be involved in the government's brilliant initiative, to help provide meals to school children as part of our ongoing commitment to feed the nation.