

# Employers For Childcare

Last updated: June 2026 for the 2026-2027 academic year

## Free School Meals and School Uniform Allowance

Please note: The information provided in this factsheet only applies to pupils attending school in Northern Ireland.

If your child attends school in England visit: [www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals](http://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals)

in Scotland visit: <http://www.mygov.scot/school-meals>,

in Wales visit: [www.gov.wales/find-out-about-free-school-meals](http://www.gov.wales/find-out-about-free-school-meals).

The Education Authority in Northern Ireland provides some pupils in full-time education with Free School Meals and School Uniform Allowances. The Education Authority is responsible for assessing eligibility based on Department of Education and Department for the Economy criteria.

### Is my child eligible for a School Uniform Allowance?

You can apply for School Uniform Allowance for children attending Primary, Secondary, Grammar, Voluntary Grammar, Integrated Secondary and Special Schools. Allowance for Physical Education (P.E.) clothing for students doing P.E. at Institutions of Further and Higher Education can also be claimed.

Children attending mainstream Nursery schools / Nursery Units or Reception Classes are not entitled to this help.

**Parents who are receiving any of the following benefits will be entitled to receive a School Uniform Allowance for their child:**

- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- The Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Universal Credit and have net household earnings not exceeding £15,900 per year.

**Parents will also be entitled to apply for a School Uniform Allowance if:**

- They are an asylum seeker supported by the Home Office under the National Asylum Support Assessment Team (ASAT)

- Their child has a statement of special educational needs and is designated to require a special diet.

A pupil who is in receipt of any of these benefits in their own name and treated as being in full-time education, is also entitled to receive Free School Meals and a School Uniform Allowance.

### How much will I receive?

The School Uniform Allowance rates for the 2026 - 2027 academic year are as follows:

	Academic Year 2026 - 2027
Mainstream primary school pupils, (born on or before 1 July 2022), including P.E. allowance	£42.90 per year
Post-primary and special school uniform allowance (aged under 15 on 01/08/2026), including P.E. allowance	£87.60 per year
Post-primary and special school uniform allowance (aged 15 or over on 01/08/2026), including P.E. allowance	£93.60 per year
Pupils at Regional Colleges / FE Colleges not in receipt of financial support and whose course includes P.E.	£26.40 per year

School Uniform Allowances will be paid directly to the bank or building society account that you gave on the application at least 10 days after you have received your approval confirmation. If no bank/building society details were entered or if you gave incorrect account details, you will receive a cheque by post however this may delay receipt of the grant.

The allowance is only a contribution towards the cost of school uniforms and will not cover the full amount. Only one School Uniform Allowance per pupil can be paid during the school year.

### Is my child eligible for Free School Meals?

The eligibility criteria for Free School Meals is similar to School Uniform Allowances, with additional children qualifying who have a statement of special educational needs and who are designated to require a special diet. Additionally, you can apply for free school meals if your child is in **full-time** nursery school / nursery unit / reception class or playgroup. However, your child will not be eligible for a uniform allowance.

Children attending part-time nursery school/nursery unit/reception class are not eligible for free school meals or a uniform allowance. You cannot receive a monetary allowance instead of your child receiving Free School Meals during term time.

## Can my child receive meals during the school holidays?

No, there is no current support during school holidays. There had been support during the school holidays up until the end of March 2023, through which families whose children were eligible for free school meals were entitled to a school holiday food grant, this was funded by the Department of Education NI.

However, the 'Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill (2026)' is currently being considered by the NI Assembly. This would place a statutory duty on the Minister of Education to provide direct payments to parents of pupils entitled to Free School Meals during all school holiday periods and exceptional closure days.

This factsheet will be updated if this bill is implemented in the future.

## How do I apply for Free School Meals or Uniform Allowance?

Applications for Free School Meals / Uniform Allowance are made online and can be made at any time each year, they do not have to be made at the beginning of the academic year. Each year details of when the online portal will open, and information on what you need to complete your online application form, are made available on the Education Authority website and on social media.

Further information is available here: [Apply for Free School Meals / Uniform Grants Education Authority Northern Ireland \(eani.org.uk\)](https://www.eani.org.uk/apply-for-free-school-meals-uniform-grants)

*Foster carers or Kinship Carers who are in receipt of funding are not eligible to make an application for free school meals and uniform allowance.*

## Contact details for the Education Authority

The Education Authority's website is: [www.eani.org.uk](https://www.eani.org.uk).

Alternatively, if additional information is required or any difficulty is experienced, parents can contact the Meals and Uniform Service Helpdesk at: [mealsanduniform@eani.org.uk](mailto:mealsanduniform@eani.org.uk) or telephone: 028 9047 0233.

**For further information or advice on any other entitlements for parents and families, please contact our Family Benefits Advice Service on [fbas@employersforchildcare.org](mailto:fbas@employersforchildcare.org).**