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**BENEFITS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT TEAM  
ANTI-POVERTY SERVICE**

**POLICY ON FREE SCHOOL MEALS AND MILK  
2026-2027**

Approved:

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## 1. Introduction

The Education (School Lunches) Amendment Regulations 2013 gives the education authority powers to provide milk, meals or other refreshment for pupils at its schools. The education authority also has a duty to provide them free of charge to pupils whose parents/guardians are in receipt of qualifying benefits/income (see section 2), and a duty to accommodate the consumption of packed lunches.

It is Council policy to provide meals (and milk in the case of nursery & primary pupils) for all who wish to take them.

## 2. The Financial Assessment Process

Children and young people will be eligible to receive free school meals through targeted provision if their parents or carers are in receipt of any of the following as laid out in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (Modification) Regulations 2026 :

Families in receipt of the following benefits will be eligible for a free mid-day meal:

- Income Support
- Pension Credit
- Income-based Jobseekers' Allowance
- any Income Related element of Employment and Support Allowance
- Universal Credit where monthly earned income does not exceed £995

Families can also be considered for a Free School Meal if they receive support under [Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999](#)

All children in nursery, and primary 1 to primary 5 will receive free school lunches, regardless of financial circumstances. Free mid-day meals are also provided, regardless of the above entitlement, to all pupils at Beatlie, Burnhouse, Cedarbank, Ogilvie School Campus and Pinewood Schools. No application from a parent/carer is necessary.

## 3. The Award

### Free School Meals

Eligible applicants will be informed by the Benefit and Financial Support Team by email of their child's entitlement to Free School Meals. Schools are informed of pupils who have been awarded Free School Meals, and only those pupils notified to schools should be provided with a free meal.

The award remains valid for one academic year (or some lesser period set by the Benefit and Support Team) provided that the applicant continues to receive a qualifying benefit.

The applicant must make a new application for Free School Meals prior to the start of a new Academic Year or when their benefit/income meets the qualifying criteria.

If a child has a specific dietary requirement the parent/carer can contact Operational Services at [catering@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:catering@westlothian.gov.uk) to discuss the needs of the child.

### Free Milk

Free milk is automatically granted to all pupils of nursery schools and classes. Free milk is also automatically granted to pupils of Beatlie, Cedarbank, Ogilvie School Campus and Pinewood schools where consumption of milk is part of the educational programme as agreed with Psychological services.

Free milk is granted to pupils in P1 to P7 where the parent/carer submits an application form and can evidence entitlement to one of the following benefits: Income Support; Pension Credit; Income-based Jobseekers' Allowance; any Income Related element of Employment and Support Allowance, or Universal Credit (with monthly earned income of £995 or less).

Milk can be provided to all primary school children at a reduced cost. Individual schools should be contacted for a price.

## Packed Lunches

Head Teachers must ensure that suitable facilities are provided, including drinking water and cups, preferably in a dining area, for pupils who choose to bring a packed lunch.

## **4. How to apply**

An application can be submitted online at [www.westlothian.gov.uk/mealsandclothing](http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/mealsandclothing). If an applicant cannot apply online they can seek assistance from the child's school or email [EducationBenefits@westlothian.gov.uk](mailto:EducationBenefits@westlothian.gov.uk). A single application is sufficient for all school-aged children in a family.

Where an applicant is in receipt of Council Tax Reduction and/or Housing Benefit the applicant should confirm this on the application, and if permission is given by the applicant to check their account the Benefit and Financial Support Team may be able to assess the application without the applicant supplying evidence.

Where permission is not given by the applicant, or the Benefit and Financial Support Team are unable to confirm via the applicant's Council Tax Reduction/Housing Benefit account, evidence must be supplied by the applicant. If applying on the basis of receiving Income Support, Income-based Jobseekers' Allowance, or any Income Related element of Employment and Support Allowance the applicant must produce a current document or in some but not all instances supply a screenshot or photo from their bank statement. Where a form is submitted on the basis of receiving Universal Credit (UC), the applicant must produce a current statement or screen print from their online journal showing all information for that period and in particular showing name, address, payment period, payment, allowances and all deductions.

Accurate confirmation of benefit details is particularly important because awards made on the basis of Income Support, Income-based Jobseekers' Allowance, any Income Related element of Employment and Support Allowance, or Universal Credit can be compared with and may add to base-line statistics on entitlement to a school clothing grant.

## **5. Enquiries, Reviews and Complaints**

West Lothian Council seeks to resolve customer dissatisfaction as close as possible to the point of service delivery. The first point of contact should be the Benefit and Financial Support Team who have undertaken the needs assessment.

If there are concerns the assessment of the application is incorrect the Benefit and Financial Support Team can be asked to review their decision.

If the individual has a complaint about the service they receive, they are entitled to make a complaint at any time. The West Lothian Council Complaints Processes will apply. Details of the review and complaints processes are available on request and on the Council's website.

## **6. Related Legislation and West Lothian Council Policies**

This policy complies with the following core legislation which continues to be the legal basis for assessment in West Lothian Council:

- The Education (School Lunches) Amendment Regulations 2013
- The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (Modification) Regulations 2026

## **7. Updates**

This policy will be reviewed annually. Up to date information will be published on the council's website [www.westlothian.gov.uk/mealsandclothing](http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/mealsandclothing). Paper copies are available on request.