

## FREE SCHOOL MEALS ELIGIBILITY CHECKING SERVICE – Frequently asked questions

### What is the ECS?

The DfE provides a website for local authorities to verify if applicants for FSM meet the eligibility criteria for entitlement. The ECS checks data from the Department of Work and Pensions, the Home Office and HMRC (Revenue and Customs) and this is compiled in one central point.

### What does a “True” result mean?

A true response indicates that the applicant is eligible for free meals.

### What does a “False” result mean and what do I do if this comes up?

A false response generally indicates that the applicant is not eligible for free school meals but please also carry out the following checks:

1. Firstly check the information provided in the CSV file was correct ie National Insurance Number (NINO), Date of Birth (DOB) and first 3 letters of their surname. Resend the CSV file once corrected.
2. Check with the applicant if their circumstances are still the same? Sometimes schools are not informed of changed circumstances as quickly as they should be. If the parent/carer is no longer eligible, remove the child(ren) from FSM immediately.
3. Ask if their application for benefits has been submitted recently? It can take up to 4 weeks for the applicant's details to reach the database – we can recheck if this is the case.
4. If they are adamant they are still eligible then please ask the applicant for evidence of qualifying benefits before giving them free school meals and/or contact us for advice.

### How often do I have to get the parents/carers to complete the application form?

The application form only needs to be completed once and held on file. A new form would need to be completed if circumstances change ie their Surname or if the child(ren's) parent/carer changes. Additional siblings joining the school can be added to the original signed form.

### Is it necessary to have the application form signed?

To ensure that SCC/Babcock 4S and Government Data Protection guidelines are adhered to, the claimant **MUST** sign the form giving permission for the school and Babcock 4S to use the personal details provided to verify the claim. It also makes them aware that they are responsible for informing the school immediately if they stop receiving qualifying benefits that would entitle their children to receive FSM.

### Will you carry out odd checks throughout the year?

Yes, we will do this for up to 2 individual checks at any one time. If you have more than 2 additional checks please add the information to the original CSV file, save it with a new date and resend to us. For individual checks the ECS gives a **Found** (✓) or **Not found** (X) result and should be dealt with in the same way as “True” and “False” results.

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## **When will you do the termly checks?**

We will do these as soon as we receive them. We will ask you at the end of each term to resubmit your latest updated CSV file - they will then be checked over the holiday period or in the early part of the new term. Babcock 4S will not be keeping a copy of the FSM results so it is important that schools keep a copy of their latest CSV results file so it can be resent termly.

## **Are Nursery Children entitled to FSM?**

Nursery children in state maintained nurseries whose parents/carers are eligible for FSM can have a meal providing the nursery children meet the following criteria:-

- Rising 4s (the term after their 3rd birthday)
- Attending Nursery School for a minimum of 12 ½ hours per week
- Receiving 'education' before and after lunch. There is a distinction between 'care' and 'education'
- The after lunch education need only be for half an hour