

Report to the Schools Forum December 2024

De-delegation for Free School Meal Eligibility Checks

1 Introduction

1.1 De-delegation decisions only apply to maintained, mainstream schools and not to academies, special schools or PRUs. Voting for Free School Meal Eligibility Checks is as follows:

- maintained primary school representatives, for maintained primary de-delegations;
- maintained secondary school representatives, for maintained secondary de-delegations.

1.2 Services for which de-delegation can be agreed are as follows:

- statutory and additional school improvement services
- contingencies (including schools in financial difficulties and deficits of closing schools)
- behaviour support services
- support to underperforming ethnic groups and bilingual learners
- free school meals eligibility
- insurance
- museum and library services
- staff costs supply cover (for example, long-term sickness, maternity, trade union and public duties)
- licences and subscriptions; except for those paid for by the DfE.

1.3 For several years, de-delegation in T&W was only agreed for one of these services, free school meal eligibility checking. For 2022/23 and 2023/24 we also requested de-delegation for school improvement service due to the reduction, then removal, of the School Improvement Grant. We will again be asking for de-delegation for statutory school improvement responsibilities in 2025/26.

1.4 For 2024/25, de-delegation for free school meal eligibility checks was agreed both by representatives of maintained primary schools and maintained secondary schools.

1.5 DfE rules around de-delegation and academy conversion are as follows:

- Any maintained schools that convert to academy status on or before 1 April will not be subject to de-delegation;
- De-delegation amounts for converters in the summer term will be retained by the LA for the period until 1 September 2025;
- De-delegation amounts for converters in the Autumn or Spring terms will be retained by the LA for the period until 31 March 2026.

2 Proposed de-delegation for free school meal eligibility checks 2025/26

2.1 The following de-delegation is proposed for maintained schools for 2025/26.

Service	Basis of de-delegation	Estimated Total based on October 2024 census
Free school meals eligibility	£9.00 for each pupil eligible for free school meals, on October 2024 census	£32,563

- 2.2 The amount per pupil is proposed to be the same for primary and secondary schools as there is no difference in the work carried out.
- 2.3 In terms of the service provided, T&W's benefits team process the applications for Free School Meals (FSM). Claimants who receive some tax credits, certain benefits or who are asylum seekers complete an application for free school meals for their children and their entitlement is assessed by the benefits team using the government's Eligibility Checking Service. Entitlement is reassessed at regular intervals.
- 2.4 In order to avoid schools having to make individual arrangements for this process to be completed, **it is proposed that maintained primary and secondary schools de-delegate a sum of £9.00 per pupil eligible for free school meals at the October 2024 census.** The proposed amount per pupil is an increase from the previous rate of £8.50, but is the first increase for six years.
- 2.5 Any institutions that are not part of de-delegation or agreed contribution arrangements will be charged for free school meal eligibility checks.

Tim Davis
Finance Manager
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