

The parent's guide to the pupil premium

If your child is eligible for free school meals, they may also be entitled to a sum of money paid to their school to boost their learning. We explain the ins and outs of the pupil premium for parents.

What is the pupil premium?

Introduced in 2011, the **pupil premium is a sum of money given to schools each year by the Government to improve the attainment of disadvantaged children.**

This is based on research showing that children from low income families perform less well at school than their peers. Often, children who are entitled to pupil premium face challenges such as poor language and communication skills, lack of confidence and issues with attendance and punctuality. The pupil premium is intended to directly benefit the children who are eligible, helping to narrow the gap between them and their classmates.

Is your child eligible?

Schools are given a pupil premium for:

- Children who have qualified for free school meals at any point in the past six years. The school receives £1320 for each of these children.
- Children who are or have been looked after under local authority care for more than one day. These children are awarded a premium of £2300.
- Children from service families who receive a child pension from the Ministry of Defence. They are awarded £300.

In March 2018 the Government announced that free school meals would only be available to children in KS2 whose families have a net income of £7400 or under, effective from 1 April 2018. If your child was previously entitled to free school meals but is no longer, they will still receive pupil premium based on the 'Ever 6' qualification (a pupil who has ever had free school meals in the past six years).

How is it spent?

Schools can choose how to spend their pupil premium money, as they are best placed to identify what would be of most benefit to the children who are eligible.

Common ways in which schools spend their pupil premium fund include:

- Extra one-to-one or small-group support for children within the classroom.
- Employing extra teaching assistants to work with classes.

- Running catch-up sessions before or after school, for example for children who need extra help with maths or literacy.
- Running a school breakfast club to improve attendance.
- Providing extra tuition for able children.
- Providing music lessons for children whose families would be unable to pay for them.
- Funding educational trips and visits.
- Paying for additional help such as speech and language therapy or family therapy.
- Funding English classes for children who speak another language at home.
- Investing in resources that boost children's learning, such as laptops or tablets.

However, some schools use their pupil premium in more creative ways. In the annual Pupil Premium Awards, recent winners spent their money on a bike for a child who was repeatedly late for school due to missing the bus, a nutritionist for a Year 5 child whose poor diet was causing behavioural and learning difficulties, and shoes and school uniform – including a PE kit – for a disadvantaged child in Year 3.

Often, **all of the children in a class will reap some benefit from how the school spends its pupil premium**: for example, if the money is used to fund an additional teaching assistant who works across the whole class, rather than providing one-to-one support. But research shows that the fund does help to narrow gaps between disadvantaged children and their peers, particularly in English and maths.

Can you influence how the pupil premium is used?

There is no obligation for your school to consult you about how they use the money they claim for your child, although some schools may involve parents. However, **schools do have to show that they are using their pupil premium fund appropriately**. This is measured through Ofsted inspections and annual performance tables showing the progress made by children who are eligible for pupil premium. In addition, they have to publish details online, including how much money they have been allocated, how they intend to spend it, how they spent their previous year's allocation and how it made a difference to the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.

How to claim your child's pupil premium

Prior to April 2018, children qualified for free school meals – and accordingly pupil premium – if you received any of the following benefits:

- Income support
- Income-based jobseekers' allowance

- Income-related employment and support allowance
- Support under Part IV of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guaranteed element of state pension credit
- Child tax credit, provided that you are not also entitled to working tax credit and have an annual gross income of £16,190 or less

These benefits have now been rolled into a single benefit, called Universal Credit. From April 2018, free school meals and pupil premium will only be allocated to pupils with a family income under £7400 (net) per year.

Your child's school will be able to tell you what you need to do to register your child as eligible.

Since September 2014, all children in Reception and Years 1 and 2 have qualified for **free school meals**, regardless of their family income, but only the children who would qualify for free meals under the above income-based criteria will receive the pupil premium.

If your child qualifies for free school meals, it's important that you tell their school – even if they take a packed lunch – as this enables them to claim pupil premium.