

# Free School Meals (Automatic Registration of Eligible Children) Bill

---

---

[AS INTRODUCED]

## CONTENTS

- 1 Free school meals: duty to identify qualifying children
- 2 Qualifying children: duty to inform schools
- 3 Free school meals: duty to provide to qualifying children
- 4 Free school meals: opting out
- 5 Free school meals: confidentiality
- 6 Interpretation
- 7 Regulations
- 8 Extent, commencement and short title

[AS INTRODUCED]

A

# B I L L

TO

Make provision about the automatic registration of all children eligible for free school meals; to provide for an opt-out where the family wishes; and for connected purposes.

**B**E IT ENACTED by the King’s most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

## 1 Free school meals: duty to identify qualifying children

- (1) A local education authority in England must identify each child of school age resident in its area who is eligible for free school meals (a “qualifying child”).
- (2) A state-funded school which identifies a qualifying child whose eligibility for free school meals has not been identified by a local education authority must inform the local education authority of the child’s eligibility. 5
- (3) The Secretary of State must, by regulations, provide—
  - (a) local education authorities,
  - (b) schools, and
  - (c) any other relevant departments or agencies 10with the powers necessary to obtain, process and exchange the information necessary for the carrying out of the duties in this section.
- (4) The power to make regulations under subsection (3) may (among other things) be exercised by modifying any provision made by or under an enactment.

## 2 Qualifying children: duty to inform schools 15

- (1) A local education authority must provide a relevant school with sufficient information collected under section 1 to enable it to carry out the duty in section 3.
- (2) For the purposes of this Act, a school is “relevant” to a local education authority if it—
  - (a) has on its pupil roll a qualifying child resident within that local education authority’s area, and
  - (b) is a state-funded school. 20

- (3) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision about the definition of “state-funded school” for the purposes of this section.

### **3 Free school meals: duty to provide to qualifying children**

- (1) A state-funded school has a duty to provide a free school meal to every qualifying child identified to the relevant school by a local education authority (subject to section 4). 5
- (2) Nothing in this Act affects any other duty to provide a free school meal to a child.

### **4 Free school meals: opting out**

- (1) Local education authorities must provide the means for a parent or guardian of a qualifying child to opt out of the arrangements in sections 1 to 3. 10
- (2) State-funded schools must make arrangements for parents or guardians of qualifying children to be able to gain access to the means provided by local education authorities under subsection (1).
- (3) The Secretary of State may by regulations make further provision in connection with this section. 15

### **5 Free school meals: confidentiality**

- (1) Local education authorities and schools must take all reasonable steps to preserve the confidentiality and right to privacy of qualifying children and their parents or guardians in respect of the information, information-sharing and administrative arrangements provided, or required, for the purposes of this Act. 20
- (2) The Secretary of State may by regulations make further provision in connection with this section.
- (3) The power to make regulations under subsection (2) may (among other things) be exercised by modifying any provision made by or under an enactment. 25

### **6 Interpretation**

- (1) The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision for the definition of the term “state-funded school” for the purposes of this Act.
- (2) For the purposes of this Act, a child is eligible for free school meals whether or not a request has been made on their behalf to the local authority. 30

### **7 Regulations**

- (1) Regulations under this Act are to be made by statutory instrument.
- (2) Regulations under this Act may not be made unless a draft of the statutory instrument containing them has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament. 35

**8 Extent, commencement and short title**

- (1) This Act extends to England and Wales.
- (2) This Act comes into force on the day on which it is passed.
- (3) This Act may be cited as the Free School Meals (Automatic Registration of Eligible Children) Act 2025.

# Free School Meals (Automatic Registration of Eligible Children) Bill

---

---

[AS INTRODUCED]

A

## **B I L L**

TO

Make provision about the automatic registration of all children eligible for free school meals; to provide for an opt-out where the family wishes; and for connected purposes.

*Presented by Peter Lamb*

---

Ordered, by The House of Commons, to be  
Printed, 16th October 2024.

---

© Parliamentary copyright House of Commons 2025

*This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at  
[www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright](http://www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright)*

PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS