

FREE SCHOOL MEALS AND ASSOCIATED BENEFITS

There are increasing numbers of additional benefits for families whose children are eligible for free school meals in addition to the meals themselves. One of these is the Home Access Grant, which pays for computers and broadband access to those eligible for free school meals and other benefits.

'If you are a low-income family receiving certain benefits and you would like to get online but are worried about the cost, then you could get a Home Access Grant to pay for:

A computer; 1 year's internet access; a computer Service; support Safety features.

Grants are limited and available on a first-come first-served basis so do not delay your application.'

This looks like an excellent opportunity for your children to gain access to broadband and the internet to support their learning, but this years' allocation is on a first come, first served basis.

We are soon to get information about the 'Give it a Go' project, also aimed at children eligible for Free School Meals.

*'This exciting national scheme enables 5 to 17 year olds entitled to free school meals and children in care to participate in out of school hours activities **for free** up to a maximum of £300 a year. It has been piloted for 18 months in some areas and goes nationwide in April 2010.'*

This is tied in with provision of extended services for families, which the school wishes to develop in as many ways as possible. I will be attending a meeting in the near future to gather more information about these opportunities.

Please look carefully at the following list of benefits that qualify your child for free school meals. Your child can have the current weekly hot meal or an alternative packed lunch every day, supplied by the school. When we trialled a school packed lunch last year, they proved very popular and are available for children entitled to free meals. As you can see there are other advantages to registering your child as eligible for free school meals.

All information is dealt with in a confidential manner, so please write to Sarah Wood or me to register your entitlement to this benefit. There are many ways that this will enhance provision for your child, including school resources, as many funding streams use Free School Meal numbers as part of the formula for income to schools.

Free school lunches

Parents do not have to pay for school lunches if they receive any of the following:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit, provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual income (as assessed by HM Revenue & Customs) that does not exceed £16,040
- Working Tax Credit during the four-week period immediately after their employment finishes or after they start to work less than 16 hours per week

I hope you find this information useful

Gill Stripp

February 1st 2010