

Eat for Free Grant

A toolkit for schools, consultants and catering providers
2026/27



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Introduction

First launched in 2009, Eat for Free is the longest running universal primary meals scheme in the UK. Newham Council drawing on money from the public health grant and other funds remains fully committed to the continued long-term funding of the scheme.

This year we are pleased to be delivering the grant in partnership with funding from the Mayor of London, with the council continuing to commit significant resource both to direct grant funds, ensuring meals are at a rate that allows our school meals workforce to be paid London Living Wage and Local Government Pensions, and indirectly by funding the team to support whole school approaches.

Each year schools and council officers meet to co-produce the grant conditions and principles. The conditions and principles are designed to maximise the impact of the grant across not just meal quality but the collective effort to be a borough delivering whole school approaches to food. Many of the grant conditions apply directly to caterers and the process of tendering for caterers.

This toolkit is designed to make it simple and clear for anyone managing a tender and enable schools going through a tendering process to onboard catering provision that is fully compliant with grant conditions. This will be important to the school/s you are working with so that they continue to be eligible for the Eat for Free grant when any new catering provision begins.

The grant principles are opportunities for caterers to shine and we hope that if you are developing a tender, you will embrace questions to caterers that enable them to outline how and commit to driving forwards whole school approaches to food.

The Eat for Free support team cuts across education and public health and are here to support with any questions or queries.

You can reach us at eatforfree.returns@newham.gov.uk



Grant conditions

The 2026/27 grant conditions are listed below in full. There are several conditions that apply specifically to caterers, and it is very important any caterer bidding for a contract fully understands them and incorporates them into their operations and pricing. These conditions are highlighted.

1. The school to submit one meal return datasheet for a single week each school term to the LA. The return will be used by the LA to measure the uptake of all school meals across primary schools. It is recommended that schools complete the once-a-term meal datasheet the week of School Census Return.
2. All schools to complete annual survey, consolidating conditions & principles monitoring into one easy piece of data collection.
3. The grant is to be used only to fund the meal costs of Key Stage 2 pupils within the school who are registered as Non-Free School Meal (FSM) Eligible. The definition of FSM Eligible is as described in the Education Act 1996.
4. The grant is only payable to the school if they participate in the Eat for Free scheme and provide school meals, free of charge, to Non-Eligible FSM pupils within Key Stage 2.
5. School meals must meet the national school food standards. All menus to be shared, on an ongoing basis (as and when they change), with Food Support team at Newham Council, this is the responsibility of the caterer. (smartfood@newham.gov.uk)
6. A variation of 10% or less (+/-) between the grant total for the year and the actual cost of served meals in the year will be managed by the school.
7. A variation greater than 10% (+/-) between the grant total for the year and the actual cost of served meals in the year will require an adjustment – either in the following year or following grant payment. Examples of where this might occur:
 - i. Increase numbers on roll through new form of entry
 - ii. Significant drop in school meal uptake
8. When going out to tender for a school meal catering provider schools must share this tender toolkit and grant letter with any consultants. Consultants/schools then share any tender documents for procuring education catering with the council (eatforfree.returns@newham.gov.uk).
9. Tenders should include the same wording included in the grant letter. Tender framework specific requirements that any new provider must adhere to shall include:
 - i. The provider must, to all employees working on this contract, pay the London Living Wage, as a minimum, and offer all employees local government pensions or a pension with terms and conditions that are broadly comparable.
 - ii. All new employees, hired by the provider, to work on this contract must be paid London Living Wage, as a minimum, and be offered local government pensions or a pension with terms that are broadly comparable.
 - iii. The provider must deliver all menus accredited to meet the Soil Association: Food for Life Served Here standards at bronze as a minimum, or to an equivalent independent inspected standard.
 - iv. Request that any tendering caterers commit to working towards the targets in the London Circular Food Purchasing Commitment.

Grant conditions: Further support and guidance

The sections that follow provide further information and clarity regarding the grant and its conditions for all tender managers and prospective caterers.

London Living Wage

Since becoming accredited as a London Living Wage Employer in March 2021, Newham Council have been encouraging other local businesses to pay the real Living Wage and make the borough a bastion of community wealth building and inclusive growth.

This years London Living Wage rate is £14.90 per hour.

By paying the **London Living Wage**, employers are taking a stand to ensure their employees can earn a wage which is enough to live on. All current and new employees working on this contract, should be paid the London Living Wage, as a minimum, with the rate updated each year on or by 1st April. Ongoing confirmation will be sought each year as part of the grant relationship. All prospective caterers should be aware of this.



Local Government Pension Scheme

All current and new employees working on this contract, should be offered the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), or access to a broadly comparable scheme. Staff entitled to be in the LGPS currently who are TUPEd to another employer must either continue to be offered the LGPS or a broadly equivalent scheme.

The term 'broadly comparable' is a legal term defined by a process supported by the Government Actuary Department. If the incoming employers opt to use a different pension it must be defined as 'comparable' through this process to meet the grant's conditions. The scheme does not have to offer identical benefits to be considered as comparable, but it must offer the same range of benefits, with the same, or greater, overall value.

The Government Actuary Department (GAD) certify whether a scheme is broadly comparable, and the certification is for the specific transfer of employees. They do not hold a list of certified schemes but can be contracted to certify whether a scheme meets the requirements for a specific transfer of staff. Find further information and support here: **Staff transfers: public service pension schemes - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)**.

Using the previous employer contribution rate could be a good indication of incoming employers' new pension rate, but be aware that this rate will vary and anyone bidding for the contract should price bids based on a verified pension cost.

For a non-local authority employer, you can find out more about the LGPS by visiting **Pension fund – Newham Council** or **Home :: LGPS (lgpsmember.org)**. To contact someone to discuss the LGPS visit **Local Pensions Partnership Administration (lppapensions.co.uk)**



School Food Standards

Compliance with the **requirements for School Food Regulations 2014** is mandatory for all maintained schools, academies and free schools. These school food standards are to ensure that food provided to pupils in school is nutritious and of high quality; to promote good nutritional health in all pupils; protect those who are nutritionally vulnerable and to promote good eating behaviour.

A summary of the standards and a practical guide are available at **[school food standards: resources for schools](#)**.

The regulations set out the requirements for school lunches provided to registered pupils, whether on the school premises or not, and to any other person on the school premises.

The regulations also set out the requirements for food and drink other than lunch, provided to pupils on school premises up to 6pm, including breakfast clubs, tuck shops, mid-morning break, vending and after school clubs.

Schools should make reasonable adjustments for pupils with particular requirements, for example to reflect medical, dietary and cultural needs.

The **Food Information Regulations 2014** requires all food businesses including school caterers to show the allergen ingredients' information for the food they serve. This makes it easier for schools to identify the food that pupils with allergies can and cannot eat. Schools should also comply with the **requirements for labelling of allergens on prepacked for direct sale (PPDS) food** that take effect from October 2021.

This departmental advice relates to the following legislation:

- Sections 512, 512ZA, 512ZB, 512A, 512B and 533 of the **Education Act 1996**, as amended
- Section 114A of the **School Standards and Framework Act 1998**
- 2014 No. 1603 Education, England **The requirements for School Food Regulations 2014**

The Food Strategy team are available to support you in ensuring menus meet the school food standards, please share menus with **jennifer.martin@newham.gov.uk** and we can provide advice and support.

There is currently a revised version of the School Food Standards which is under consultation. These will be introduced in September 2027, and we will work with schools and caterers to support meeting these standards.

'Food for Life Served Here' accreditation

Food for Life Served Here (FFLSH) is the Soil Association's flagship catering certification that verifies the food on the plate to support caterers to demonstrate their commitment to climate, nature, and health, by focusing on food that is fresh, local and sustainable. FFLSH provides the certification to evidence the quality of the food provision as well as procurement practices.



For more information on the award scheme visit the Soil Association webpage: **[Food for Life Served Here - Food for Life](#)**.

If a caterer wishes to use an equivalent independent certification, they should confirm the provider and check that it is considered equivalent with the Council at **eatforfree.returns@newham.gov.uk**

Circular Food Purchasing Commitment

The London Borough of Newham was one of the first councils to sign a commitment to reduce the environmental impact of the food they buy and serve across council services and deliver against net zero and consumption-based emissions targets. It sets out unified and ambitious targets to ensure that food bought and served across council-controlled services is climate-friendly; that less of it is wasted; and that local and sustainable food producers and growers are championed. It also establishes a reporting framework to measure the emissions and waste reductions resulting from these actions, thereby celebrating London's progress and inspiring other cities to follow suit.



Support and monitoring will be provided by the Council in partnership with our partners at **ReLondon** and the food theme of London Councils' One World Living Programme.

Caterers should be fully aware of the commitment and specifically should commit to:

- Reduce per plate emissions by 38% per plate against their baseline figure by 2030.
- Increase the percentage of the total ingredient budget that is spent on food that supports fairer, more equitable, sustainable and farmer-focused production, and food that builds wealth within communities by 2030
- Reduce their food waste over the duration of the contract to achieve a 50% reduction by 2030 at the latest.

Find out more here: [Circular food procurement - ReLondon and Hackney, Hounslow, Lambeth and Newham councils pave the way in London's food system transformation - ReLondon](#)

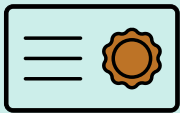


Grant principles

We encourage all schools to strive towards the grant principles, these help to maximise impact. It is important for schools to be on a principles journey to ensure funds are allocated by the council each year.

Caterers demonstrating that they can help schools meet the principles serves as a key point of differentiation. Including this ask in your tender is an opportunity to advance your school's work on food culture.

Becoming a Mayor of London Healthy Schools Programme bronze accredited school



Becoming Soil Association: Food For Life Whole School Accredited, to at least a bronze standard, if not already doing so



Becoming a water only school



Encouraging the practice of Teaching Assistants supervising lunchtime and ensuring they have sufficient training and skills to create a positive dining experience for all



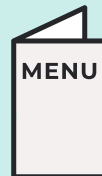
Ensuring that there is food literacy work integrated into the mainstream curriculum



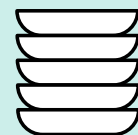
Engaging in food growing on the school's site



Requesting that caterers deliver menu co-production with Newham children and families



Actively encouraging the uptake of meals, targeting above 90% take up



Actively working to ensure that any packed lunches meet the school food standards



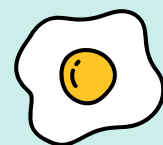
Encouraging governors/trustees' involvement in discussions around school food provision and culture



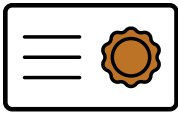
Actively reducing food waste and working towards getting a food waste collection in place



Providing a breakfast offer to all children who need it ensuring they get the best start to their day



Grant principles: Further support and guidance



Healthy Schools accreditation

Healthy Schools London is an awards scheme that will reach out to every London child, working with schools to improve children and young people's wellbeing. The award process takes schools through a journey to develop a healthy environment. The award is linked to a variety of health and wellbeing areas including healthy eating/food, PSHE, physical activity, the environment, mental health and active travel with three levels to work towards, bronze, silver and gold. In Newham, we are fortunate to have a Healthy Schools Lead who provides support to all schools throughout the process. As part of this award, you will be required to have a whole school food policy which should be shared with the Healthy Schools Lead.

For more information and resources please visit: [About | Healthy Schools \(london.gov.uk\)](#). To begin your Healthy Schools journey please contact amy.hayfield@newham.gov.uk.



'Food for Life School' accreditation

A Food for Life Schools Award is an accreditation which displays schools demonstrating that they are doing fantastic work to provide healthy school meals, great lunchtimes and food education that has a positive impact on both pupils and the wider community.

The programme supports your school to:

- Improve health, wellbeing and motivation of pupils and staff
- Encourage pupils to take part in enrichment activities
- Enable children to feel empowered to make their own choices to improve wellbeing
- Connect with parents and your local community

For further information please visit: [Schools Award - Food for Life](#).

What would a great caterer do?

Support you by inviting parents to taste school food to build trust with the school's community. The catering team would also actively encourage children to try new, nutritious options for example, vegetables.



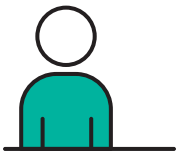
Water only

Partners across London have come together to encourage all schools to become water only. Being water only means making sure that water (and plain semi skimmed or skimmed milk, lactose free or soya milk) is the only drink in your school. By choosing water, this means children are not drinking sugary drinks which contribute to many preventable health conditions like obesity, tooth decay and type 2 diabetes. What's more is that London's tap water is excellent and one litre of tap water costs less than a fifth of a penny, 500 times less than bottled water and by using reusable water bottles we can help cut single-use plastics. Many schools across London, and in Newham, are already water only and seeing the benefits.

For more support or information on becoming a water only school, please visit: [Water only school toolkit | London City Hall](#).

What would a great caterer do?

Encourage students to drink water, and not serve other drinks such as squash, fruit juice or carbonated drinks. They could provide posters and signage to increase water consumption. They would also promote a culture of refillable bottles.



Lunchtime Supervisors

The Lunchtime Supervisor role is essential in linking the school food workforce together with the school. These vital links can help towards a whole school approach to food and a positive lunchtime experience for everyone. We encourage all schools to utilise training available to upskill Lunchtime Supervisors and to work towards meeting the 'professional standard for a midday supervisor' to ensure best practice within this role ([LACA Professional Standards: Midday Supervisor](#)).



Food literacy and food growing on the curriculum

Childhood and adolescence are key periods for establishing the foundations of eating habits. Different food literacy competencies are acquired as children that will enable them to grow into adults able navigate a complex food system. It is a journey of learning skills, gaining knowledge and positive confidence building experiences. Newham schools supported the council to co-produce the infographic to the right of what a food literate young person looks like at 11.

The concept of food literacy integrated into the mainstream curriculum is beyond standalone events such as 'healthy eating week' or the occasional cooking

lesson to a place where whenever food appears in Maths to French, PE to Science there is a clear food literacy opportunity.

Food culture should be cohesive and positive across the school, with staff also modelling healthy behaviours. Part of this is valuing the senses we need to enjoy and differentiate food. Children and young people should be given the opportunity to explore foods in a non-pressured way, giving them confidence around food as well as new flavours or textures they are introduced to. This is all about building a young person who has a positive relationship with food as well as enjoying learning about food in a holistic sense.

Nurturing a deep-rooted connection to healthy food is the best way to prepare them for a world in which making good food choices is a challenge. Growing food in a school garden can be a great way to contribute to your school's 'Whole School Approach' to food literacy, and should be seen as part of a wider push for children's health. Studies show that when children are involved in growing fruit and vegetables, it increases their willingness to eat these foods. For more support around food literacy or food growing please visit:

- [Newham-food-growing-toolkit](#)
- [Changing food education in the UK | Taste Education](#)
- [Free education resources for teaching young people - Food A Fact Of Life](#)



What would a great caterer do?

Deliver food education sessions and workshops to students and engage with and support teachers to do so (for example helping source ingredients or equipment). The school chef might make appearances in assemblies. They would also utilise food growing opportunities and use produce in school meals, clearly communicating to the children where the produce has come from to build a deeper connection with their school lunch.

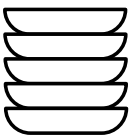


Menu co-production

It is important that Newham children, young people and families are consulted in the menu production process. This is best practise, and it ensures the food served is culturally appropriate and tailored to students' preferences. Co-production of menus has been shown to increase willingness to eat the food on offer and the open conversation helps in building trust and positive relationships between students and the kitchen team.

What would a great caterer do?

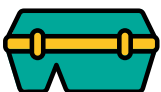
Speak with children and parents from the borough during the creation process of their menus and hold taster sessions where they take feedback on their proposed offer before a menu is launched to ensure the needs of the local community are met. A School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG) is the ideal group to regularly discuss and feedback on school food.



Encouraging uptake of meals

Research shows that school lunches are more nutritious than packed lunches, with only 2% of packed lunches meeting the School Food Standards. It is important for the school to work to increase uptake of school meals to ensure as many children and young people benefit from this nutritious offer as possible. This could involve tasting opportunities for students who are reluctant, inviting parents in to taste the food on offer and encouraging an open conversation with students who don't take a school lunch.

We want all schools to be aiming for an uptake of over 90%.



Packed lunches

Left unchecked, research has shown that only 1.7% of packed lunches in primary schools in England meet the recommended dietary guidelines. Shockingly, the same study found 42% of packed lunches were found to contain high sugar beverages and over half contained sweet treats, such as confectionery.

Where pupils are choosing to bring in their own packed lunch, these should also be nutritious and compliant with School Food Standards. A way of ensuring this is by having a packed lunch policy in place, this could be a standalone policy or a section within your whole school food policy. This should be shared with parents and added to the school website. For an example packed lunch policy visit: [Packed lunch policy - School Food Plan](#)



Governors' responsibilities

Governors are responsible for having clear oversight and strategic responsibility and this applies to food in schools. The Department for Education recommends that all governors “work with the senior leadership team to develop a whole school food policy that sets out the school’s approach to its provision of food, food education (including practical cooking), the role of the catering team as part of the wider school team and the school’s strategy to increase the take-up of school lunches.” How the school is taking a holistic approach to food should be discussed with the governors regularly, and to experience the lunchtime alongside pupils can be a great way to keep engagement in this important area of school life active..

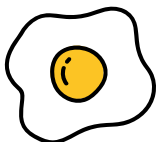


Food waste

As part of Newham Borough Council’s ‘Just Transition’ plan, we are committed to reducing and diverting food waste. Reducing food waste by 50% by 2030 is also a requirement of the **Circular Food Purchasing Commitment** and schools are asked to support this work through education around food waste.

What would a great caterer do?

Commit to having a composting system in place or using a sustainable food waste collection service where food waste could be used to create biofuel or fertiliser. They would also demonstrate that they would have a track record of minimising food waste.



Breakfast

Having a nutritious breakfast at school makes a big impact across a child’s school journey. It’s not just a great start to the day. For pupils experiencing socio-economic disadvantage it has been continuously proven to positively impact educational attainment, concentration, focus and behaviour as well as mental and emotional wellbeing, physical health and wellbeing and improved healthy eating habits. Breakfast should be available for those children who want and need it, we know this comes at an extra cost and there are options for funding to support your breakfast provision. The Eat for Free team will provide up to date information with support and offers available.

Where, for example, schools are very close together access might mean a club on a nearby site rather than in each individual school.

What would a great caterer do?

A great caterer will support the school with the delivery of a breakfast offer, either free of charge or at a nominal cost.

Tender Checklist

Thank you for taking time to read this toolkit. Any further questions: eatforfreereturns@newham.gov.uk

As you manage your tender, please complete this checklist to confirm that you are on course. As you do so, please refer to the grant conditions, as well as the supporting guidance for further information. You can submit this when sending your tender to the Eat for Free support team at eatforfreereturns@newham.gov.uk

I am managing this tender, and I confirm that I have ...

Action	✓
Read the most recent 'Eat for Free Grant Allocation and Conditions' letter in full	
Understood reporting requirements that schools face each year and that they are annually asked to demonstrate that their caterer is grant compliant.	
Ensured that tenderers are aware that all food and drink provision is clearly required by the tender (including breakfast, mid-morning break, lunch and after school) to meet the School Food Standards .	
Highlighted with tenderers that new menus must be shared with the Council on an ongoing basis throughout the contract and ensured that all tenderers have committed to this in their bid.	
Included the exact wording of grant conditions explaining that current and new employees working on this contract should be paid the London Living Wage, as a minimum . Ensured all tenderers have built in expected LLW rises into their pricing.	
Included the exact wording of the grant condition on pensions. explaining that current and new employees working on this contract should be offered Local Government Pension Scheme, or broadly comparable .	
Ensured that all tenderers are clear that the term 'broadly comparable' is as per the government's legal definition of pension equivalence and referred all potential tenderers to the government guidance and relevant section in the toolkit. Ensured that all tenderers have built this cost into their pricing.	
Included the exact wording explaining that the provider must deliver all menus accredited to meet the Soil Associations Food for Life Served Here standards at bronze as a minimum, or to an equivalent independent inspected standard. Ensured that if using an alternative all tenderers have provided this information and it has been checked with the Council.	
Included the exact wording on the Circular Food Purchasing Commitment grant condition. Ensured that all tenderers commit to both the method and the targets in the commitment in their bid.	
Ensured that prospective caterers are aware of the grant principles and incorporated evaluation of their ability to support principles delivery into my tender process.	
Shared a copy of my finished tender document with the Council before publication (eatforfree.returns@newham.gov.uk)	

