

Dear Parents and Carers

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING THE FREE SCHOOL MEAL VOUCHER SCHEME

As the group of 14 Kirkby schools forming the Kirkby Collaborative of Schools we are writing to you with an update about the voucher system which is currently used to support you during this time of difficulty. We are delighted that the service provided by WONDE has been so effective and that very few problems have been reported. Knowsley Council have taken the decision to carry on with WONDE to deliver vouchers for the time being which is good for both schools and families as we can be sure our children are being looked after. There is also another national provider of vouchers who Knowsley may look to move to in the future if necessary, but only when we can be sure they can deliver an efficient service.

At the beginning of this unprecedented situation with COVID-19, Knowsley took the decision to provide meals vouchers for both means tested free schools meals eligible children and also to all other children in year groups Reception, Year 1 and Year 2, as part of the universal free schools meal provision. This decision was welcomed and appreciated in these challenging times.

As we now move further into the current school closure period, Knowsley Council has had to reconsider its approach so it is more in line with other authorities nationally. Unfortunately, it is not sustainable for the Council to continue to fund vouchers for all. Knowsley have therefore decided that this funding will not carry on and with immediate effect, vouchers will now only be provided to those families who are eligible due to low income and means testing. We appreciate that this will be disappointing news to many but we are sure you will also understand that the Council must also keep within spending limits. More information can be found in the article in the Knowsley News

<https://www.knowsleynews.co.uk/free-school-meals-eligibility-system/>

Are you eligible for means tested Free School Meals?

The Council have asked schools to encourage parents and carers to check if they are eligible for a free school meal for their child / children, given that many parents' and carers' work situations may have changed due to COVID-19. Some parents/carers of infant children may not have applied previously as they are automatically entitled to free school meals under the Universal offer. We want to be sure that we are issuing as many vouchers as possible over the remaining period of the lockdown – maximising this uptake will help to ensure that no pupils who are eligible for a free school meal go without one.

The application form for Free School Meals is attached to this letter. **If you have any issues or need advice re. free school meals please contact 0151 443 4042.** Completed forms can be returned to the One Stop Shop or emailed to benefits@knowsley.gov.uk.

Please also remember that if you are aware of any family in need of support, they can contact the Knowsley Support and Volunteer freephone line on 0800 073 0043. Staff are available to take their call 24/7 and will help people to access support during these challenging times.'

As a group of schools we would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for the support you have given us during these difficult times. It has been so lovely to receive feedback from parents and carers, and even more so from your children. We will, of course, continue to do everything we can to support all our school communities.

From the 14 Headteachers in The Kirkby Collaborative of Schools