

Dear Principal,

Re: Catering Special diet application process

As we start another school year, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you of the importance of ensuring that pupils who require a special diet of any kind complete and submit a Catering special diet application form.

Special diet applications should be completed whether the diet is **medically prescribed** due, for example, to allergies; or for **religious or cultural reasons**; or because a pupil is **vegetarian or vegan**.

The Catering special diet application process was introduced in 2014 and is a **shared responsibility** requiring input and communication between the school Principal, the child's Parent/Guardian, and the Catering Service at your school. The process exists to help mitigate and manage risks to children and young people and all aspects of it must be followed to ensure that meals can be provided to pupils requiring special diets. The process, roles and responsibilities are set out on the flowchart accompanying this letter.

In all cases the school should provide the blank form "EA Guidance for the Provision of Special Diets in Schools" to the child or young person's Parent/Guardian to complete and return to the school office. Where the application is for a special diet based on **medical need** (including for food allergies), the school should then arrange a meeting between the school, the Parent/Guardian and the School Catering Service.

It is essential all special diets are made known to your school's Catering team and that the school staff responsible for serving these meals on or off-site are aware of the requirements for each pupil. In all circumstances it is best practice to have an agreed and well-documented process, understood by all parties, on how the pupil will be identified and served the correct meal. In the case of medical diets, these arrangements should be agreed at a meeting involving the school, Parent/Guardian and the Catering Service at your school. The meeting provides an opportunity for all parties to understand the child's dietary needs and agree the actions to provide a safe and suitable meal.

It is vitally important that Catering special diet application forms are completed in full and returned to Catering staff in your school. Incomplete forms will not be accepted and will be returned to the Parent/Guardian for completion. This may result in a delay in the child receiving a special diet.

Catering staff at your school are required to regularly review arrangements for special diet provision and your co-operation in facilitating this is essential.

Please see the **Additional Guidance** note attached for further details.

Yours sincerely

Dale Hanna

Chief Operating Officer, Education Authority

"To inspire, support and challenge all our Children and Young People to be the best that they can be."

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Additional Guidance – special diets applications for children with a Statement of special educational needs

[introduced August 2024]

There is a separate process within the Free School Meals and Uniform Service whereby parents whose children are ineligible for Free School Meals (FSM) under the standard financial criteria can apply for FSM on the grounds of Special Diet for a child who has a Statement of Special Educational Needs at Stage 3 and requires a medically prescribed Special Diet.

Parents/Carers should submit an application for FSM on the grounds of Special Diet via the EA Connect FSM application portal <https://connect.eani.org.uk/parent/Login>

When the school receives the list of pupils who have been deemed eligible for free school meals, 'SD' will be marked beside the child's name to indicate where a child has been granted FSM under the Special Diet criterion and for whom a special diet should be provided.

The Catering special diet application form page 1 has been updated and now states:

- **If your child requires a special diet for medical/ health reasons, please complete Part A and Part C of this form, in addition Part D Special Diet Medical Form. Please note, special diet medical forms may be signed only by a medical consultant, GP or registered dietitian.**
- **If your child has been deemed eligible and you have received confirmation for a free school meal on the grounds of a special diet requirement, please only complete Part A and Part C of this form.**

Further changes have also been made to the form to reflect this - the special diet meeting checklist has been revised and replaced with a special diet checklist. The information has been condensed and is now in table format outlining steps with a "yes / no" box to complete.

Please see attached Catering special diet application form and accompanying flow chart.

Flowchart for the Provision of Special Diets in Schools

