



Pupils not claiming free school meals

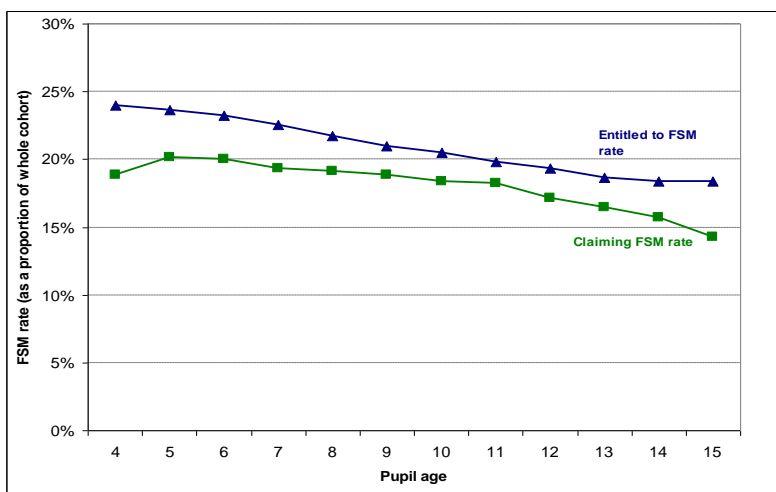
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The aim of this paper is to present estimates of the numbers and proportions of pupils who are **entitled** to receive free school meals (FSM) but are not currently **claiming**.

Key findings

- Benefits data from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) suggests that around 1.4 million (21%) of children aged 4-15 in England are entitled to receive FSM.
- School Census data shows that around 1.2 million (18%) of 4-15 year old pupils in maintained schools are registered to claim FSM.
- Therefore around 200,000 pupils (**3% of all pupils aged 4-15**) appear to be entitled but are not claiming FSM.
- This means **14% of pupils entitled to FSM are not claiming them**.
- The proportion of pupils entitled to FSM decreases with age: 24 % of 5 year olds are entitled compared to 18% of 15 year olds.
- Of those pupils entitled to FSM, the proportion not claiming FSM is the same for both primary school and secondary school aged pupils.

The proportion of pupils entitled to FSM, compared to the proportion claiming FSM, by age



Source: School Census 1989 – 2012.

- In the South East and East of England nearly one quarter of entitled pupils are not claiming FSM, which contrasts sharply with the North East where the equivalent figure is 2%.
- At local authority (LA) level under-registration rates range between 0% and 33%. LAs with the highest under-registration rates are Buckinghamshire and Richmond (both 33%), and Suffolk and Surrey (32%).
- Analysis using survey data suggests that pupils with the following characteristics, which are not directly linked to the FSM criteria, have lower likelihoods of claiming FSM. This is after other characteristics have been taken into account:
 - pupils living in a less deprived area;
 - pupils attending schools with a lower school FSM rate;
 - pupils from families with higher status occupations (i.e. professional rather than routine occupations);
 - pupils living in a family with higher parental qualifications; and
 - pupils of Chinese ethnic origin.
- There is some evidence to suggest that families entitled to FSM while in some part-time work are less likely to claim FSM than those on out-of-work benefits.

Terminology

- **Entitled to FSM** – Pupils are entitled to receive FSM if they live in households claiming qualifying benefits
- **Registered and claiming FSM** – This relates to those who meet the entitlement criteria and register at the school to claim FSM. This is what is reported by the School Census and described in DfE publications as “known to be eligible for and claiming FSM”
- **Taking FSM** – This relates to how many of the pupils registered to claim FSM actually take the meal on any given day.

Additional Information

The full report can be accessed at <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/> Further information about this research can be obtained from Emily Knowles Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT Emily.KNOWLES@education.gsi.gov.uk

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.