

Freedom of Information Request – Response – 27869

I am requesting information concerning pupil numbers, free school meal eligibility, expenditure on free school meals and school catering arrangements.

Time periods requested:

- Academic school year 2019/20
- Academic school year 2020/21
- Academic school year 2021/22
- Academic school year 2022/23
- Academic school year 2023/24
- Academic school year 2024/25
- Academic school year 2025/26
- Academic school year 2026/27
- Academic school year 2027/28

Please note, much of the following information is held by Suffolk County Council (SCC) and is readily accessible to you as it already in the public domain.

Section 21 of the FOIA states that a public authority does not need to provide information under section 1 of the Act if that information is reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means. Please use the links provided to access the requested information.

1. Pupils in your schools

1a. For each of the school years above, how many pupils did you have in the schools for which you hold the relevant information?

1b. Please provide a breakdown of these figures by nursery/reception, infant, primary and secondary education, confirming the relevant age group, for example 3–4 year olds, 4–5 year olds and so on, where this information is held.

This is published on the DfE website <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-school-and-pupil-numbers>

1c. Since the 2026/27 academic year has now begun, please confirm the number of pupils you hold for 2026/27 and provide the data.

SCC can only provide figures for mainstream schools, not special schools or PRUs / Alternative Provision. We also only have figures for Reception to Year 11.

As at, 17th September 2026 the numbers on roll for primary and secondary schools, by NCY are as follows:

R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
6869	6833	6976	7182	7441	7715	7907	7666	7740	7716	7901	7745

1d. Since councils plan ahead, please provide your predicted or actual pupil numbers for 2027/28, where you hold recorded forecasts, projections, estimates or other relevant information. Please confirm what information you hold and provide the data.

Forecast pupil numbers by year group for the 2027/28 school year are:

R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
6875	7215	7060	7292	7497	7739	7999	7888	7878	7874	7946	8118	2993	2568

2. Numbers on free school meals

2a. For each of the school years above, how many pupils were recorded as eligible for free school meals (FSM)?

2b. Please provide a breakdown of these figures by nursery/reception, infant, primary and secondary education, confirming the relevant age group, for example 3–4 year olds, 4–5 year olds and so on, where this information is held.

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2c. Since the 2026/27 academic year has now begun, please confirm the number of pupils recorded as eligible for FSM for 2026/27 and provide the data.

The figures for Free School Meals covers all children with a current FSM claim. Some of these are not in schools recorded in the school census.

As at, 17th September 2026, the current numbers eligible for FSM, by NCY, are

E	N	N	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
2	1	2															
1	3	17	12	13	16	22	22	24	25	25	23	23	22	21	15	22	14
	1	6	83	75	30	26	13	39	09	50	45	40	73	46	87	9	8

2d. Since councils plan ahead, please provide your predicted or actual numbers for pupils eligible for FSM for 2027/28, where you hold recorded forecasts, projections, estimates or other relevant information. Please confirm what information you hold and provide the data. For the avoidance of doubt, I am asking for the number of pupils recorded as eligible for free school meals, rather than simply the number of pupils who actually took a meal.

Suffolk County Council does not forecast the numbers of pupils eligible for Free School Meals.

3. Budget and expenditure for free school meals

3a. During each of the school years above, how much did your council spend on, or allocate for, free school meals?

3b. Where the information is held in a breakdown by nursery/reception, infant, primary and secondary education, please provide that breakdown, confirming the relevant age group where available.

3c. Since the 2026/27 academic year has now begun, please confirm the budget or other recorded financial allocation for free school meals for 2026/27 and provide the data.

3d. Since councils plan ahead, please provide the predicted or actual budget, allocation, forecast or other recorded financial information concerning free school meals for 2027/28, where such information is held.

If the council does not hold expenditure or budget information at the level requested, please confirm what relevant information it does hold.

Free School Meals funding is paid directly to schools by the DfE

4. School kitchens

Without revealing any commercially sensitive or confidential information, please confirm how many schools have their own kitchens for the preparation of school meals.

5. External catering

Without revealing any commercially sensitive or confidential information, please confirm how many schools rely on an external catering provider to prepare and/or supply school meals.

Please contact individual schools for this information.

[Find a school in Suffolk - Suffolk County Council](#)

6. Eligibility for free school meals

Please provide copies of, or links to, any guidance, policies, documents or reports held by the council which explain:

- *the eligibility criteria for free school meals; and*
- *how parents or carers apply for free school meals.*

[Apply for free school meals - Suffolk County Council](#)