# Chancellor considers cuts to universal free school meals in austerity plan



Chancellor Rachel Reeves is reportedly considering eliminating universal free school meals for infants as part of a significant austerity plan, projected to result in cuts totalling £500 million within the education sector. This proposal, which has surfaced in various newspapers, is said to have been suggested by Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson and is likely to be included in the Chancellor's upcoming spring spending statement. This announcement is scheduled for Wednesday, aiming to implement measures to save billions of pounds across the government.

Currently, approximately 1.8 million children in reception classes and Years 1 and 2 benefit from these meals, which are intended to provide all young children with a healthy start to their day. The anticipated change would shift from universal provision to a means-tested system, similar to that which already applies to older children. This alteration could result in parents having to pay out of pocket for lunch, impacting many families across the country.

Furthermore, reports indicate that the Education Secretary is also considering the termination of funding for free period products in schools, as well as cuts to arts education, including dance, music, and physical education schemes. In a related move, schools would be instructed to award pay rises to teachers but reportedly without accompanying financial support to cover these wage increases. Schools would then be expected to find the necessary funds through what has been described as "efficiencies," a situation that could potentially lead to staff reductions.

Responses to these proposals have been tumultuous, with officials within the Department for Education vehemently denying the reports. This suggests significant discord within government circles just days before the Chancellor's budget announcement. The Treasury's overarching goal involves imposing budget cuts of up to 11% across various Whitehall departments. The implications of these measures are likely to be considerable, impacting educational institutions and families reliant on governmental support for essential services.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)