

8 July 2026

Dear Parent/Guardian

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES

Free School Meals Expanded Eligibility: Important Changes from September 2026

We are writing to let you know about changes to Free School Meals (FSM) from September 2026. The Government is extending eligibility for FSM, meaning that more families may now qualify for support, even if they have not previously been eligible.

We encourage all families to take a few minutes to read the below as this change can make a real difference.

What is Changing?

Expanded Entitlement for Families on Universal Credit

From the start of academic year 2026-2027, all children in households receiving Universal Credit will be entitled to free school meals, regardless of earnings.

Going forward, there will be two types of eligibility:

- **Targeted FSM:** for households in receipt of universal credit earning £7,400 or less (includes free meals and additional support such as pupil premium). Other educational entitlements such as the Holiday Activities and Food program (HAF) and the 'extended rights' element of school travel assistance, will also continue to be based on targeted FSM.
- **Expanded FSM:** for households in receipt of universal credit earning above £7,400 (free meals only)

Families with no recourse to public funds may also be eligible for Targeted FSM subject to meeting separate criteria.

End of Transitional Protections

Since 2018, some children have continued to receive free school meals, even if their family circumstances changed during the rollout of Universal Credit. This is referred to as transitional protections.



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Now that entitlement is being expanded to all families on Universal Credit, these protections will end at the end of the 2025-2026 academic year.

This means:

- Some children may **no longer be eligible** from the start of the 2026-2027 academic year if their family does not receive Universal Credit or another qualifying benefit
- Eligibility will now be based on current benefit status

What Happens Next?

Families Currently Claiming FSM

If your child is already receiving FSM, there is nothing you need to do. The local authority, Lancashire County Council, already holds your information and will automatically check your child's eligibility ahead of their return to school in September 2026. If there is a change in eligibility, they will contact you to let you know.

Families Not Previously Eligible For FSM

If your child has not been receiving a free school meal, you may now be eligible under the expanded criteria.

What you need to do

- If you think you may now be eligible, we strongly encourage you to submit an application before the start of the new academic year.
- Applications are quick, confidential and securely processed
- Even if your child prefers a packed lunch, applying can still bring valuable benefits to both your child and the school

Why it's important to apply

- Ensures your child receives all the support they are entitled to
- Helps your child's school access additional funding to support pupils
- May provide access to further support, such as help with trips or activities

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How To Apply

You will need to apply if your child is not currently receiving free school meals and you are claiming Universal Credit. Applying usually only takes a few minutes by visiting www.lancashire.gov.uk/schools and clicking on 'free school meals'.

If you would like further information or support with your application, please contact the Business & Finance Team.

Yours faithfully



Mrs C Barker
Strategic Business Development Manager

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