

July 2026

Important Changes to Free School Meals (FSM) Eligibility for the 2026/27 Academic Year

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are writing to inform you about important national updates from the Department for Education (DfE) regarding Free School Meals entitlement. These changes will take effect at the start of the new school year in September 2026, and **all families who believe they are eligible must reapply: <https://apply.cloudforedu.org.uk/ofsm/sims>**

Please read the details below carefully to understand how these updates impact your household and what steps you need to take next.

What is Changing?

1. The End of "Transitional Protections"

Since 2018, temporary "transitional protections" have been in place. This meant that once a child became eligible for Free School Meals, they automatically kept that entitlement for their entire phase of education, even if their family's financial circumstances changed.

These protections are officially ending at the close of the current school year (August 2026). Moving forward, schools are required to check eligibility **annually**. To continue receiving free school meals in September, households must meet the government's updated criteria (please see below to re-apply).

2. Two New Categories of Free School Meals

To support more families, the government is expanding eligibility to all households receiving Universal Credit. Eligibility will fall into one of the following categories, and both will receive the same Free School Meal allowance.



- Targeted FSM: This covers pupils in households receiving Universal Credit with an annual net earned income of £7,400 or less (or those receiving other qualifying legacy benefits). This group continues to unlock vital extra funding for the school (Pupil Premium).
- Expanded FSM: This is a brand-new category. It covers pupils who do not meet the lower-income threshold above, but whose households are actively receiving Universal Credit. Children in this group will also be fully entitled to receive a free school meal every day.

3. The End of Holiday Supermarket Vouchers

Alongside these national changes to term-time eligibility, the government-funded 'Household Support Fund' has now officially ended. As a result, the school will no longer be able to issue automatic food vouchers during the school holidays. Instead, government holiday support is shifting to the [Holiday Activities and Food \(HAF\) Programme](#), which provides free holiday activity clubs that include a healthy hot meal for eligible children. Please rest assured that this update *only* affects holiday vouchers; your child's daily free meals during the school term remain secure as long as you complete the eligibility check below.

What You Need to Do Next

Because the old protections are ending, **every family currently receiving benefits-based Free School Meals must have their eligibility rechecked before the new term begins.**

- If you currently receive Universal Credit (regardless of your earnings), you must submit a fresh check. If your income is above £7,400, your child will transition to the new Expanded FSM category and will successfully continue to receive free meals. In order for this check to be made, please complete the form at the end of this letter.
- If you believe you are newly eligible under the Universal Credit expansion, we highly encourage you to apply so your child can start receiving free meals from September.

Please note that if you do not complete the form below and you are currently eligible for Free School Meals, you will automatically lose your entitlement to this from September.

To ensure there is no disruption to your child's school meals in September or to register a new check, please apply here: <https://apply.cloudforedu.org.uk/ofsm/sims>



We understand that changes to these systems can be confusing. Please rest assured that we are here to support you through this transition. If you have any questions, please email admin@ssa.cidari.co.uk in confidence.

Thank you for your cooperation and prompt attention to this matter.

Yours faithfully,

South Shore Academy