

## Free School Meals are changing in September 2026

From September 2026 the eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) is changing, which means that more families will become eligible.

### **What's new?**

All children registered with state-funded schools **whose household receives Universal Credit** will be able to get a free school meal.

There will be two categories of benefits-based free school meals, known as '**Targeted FSM**' or '**Expanded FSM**':

#### **Targeted FSM**

- which continues to be based on the existing threshold, covering children who are in households in receipt of Universal Credit with annual household earnings of £7,400 or less
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

Households may also be entitled to a meal if they:

- are in receipt of Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- receive the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- meet criteria set out in separate guidance for families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) [families with no recourse to public funds](#).

Children eligible under Targeted FSM will be eligible for the [Holiday Activities and Food \(HAF\) programme](#), possible assistance with Home to School Transport (HTST) and extra funding for their school such as pupil premium.

#### **Expanded FSM**

- a new category covering meals only, for children who do not qualify for Targeted FSM, but who are in households receiving Universal Credit.

### **Transitional Protections are ending**

Since April 2018, children who qualified for benefits-based free school meals kept them even if their household circumstances changed.

- This protection will end on 31 August 2026.
- From September 2026, all households must meet the eligibility criteria to continue receiving benefits-based free school meals.

### **Annual eligibility re-checks**

Eligibility for free meals will be kept under regular review through annual re-checks, ahead of the start of each academic year. All children currently in receipt of benefits-based free school meals need to be re-checked before September.

We will re-check eligibility using the information that was provided to us at the time an application was made for a child. The re-check process will be done during the summer term and where the re-check from the government checking system provides a 'not eligible' result, families will be notified by a letter through their school before the end of the summer term.



Schools will pass this letter onto who they hold as the main contact for the pupil. The letter will include information on what to do next and if a re-application is needed.

### **New Applications**

Applications under the new criteria can start from 24 June 2026. Children that are approved for Targeted FSM will be eligible from the date the application is processed and children approved for Expanded FSM will be eligible from 1 September 2026.

Free School Meals applications can be made using the Shropshire online portal. Please scan the code below, or use the following link [Apply for free school meals | Shropshire Council](#).



If you have previously applied online for a school admission place, 24U funding or FSM, please use the same login details. If you have an email address, the online application is the quickest and easiest way to apply. The Council's [Shropshire Local Team](#) are available to help with access to the online application. Alternatively, you can call our Customer Services on [0345 678 9008](tel:03456789008) who will be able to take the details for an application over the phone. If these options aren't suitable, please contact your child's school who will be able to assist you.

For current Year 11 pupils who are leaving school and moving to a post-16 college in September, you will need to apply directly to the college for free meals.

### **Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM)**

Children in reception, year 1 and year 2 will continue to be entitled to free meals, regardless of the earnings or benefit status of their households, under the UIFSM programme. Families are still encouraged to apply for benefits-based free school meals because if you are eligible for Targeted FSM, you could attract additional funding for your child's school and you will also be able to access the other support linked to Targeted FSM, such as the HAF programme.

### **Applications under No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)**

If you would like to submit an application under NRPF criteria, please email [FSM@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:FSM@shropshire.gov.uk) for more information. The online application form cannot be used.

We hope this update helps to clarify the upcoming changes. Please visit our webpage for further information [Free school meals | Shropshire Council](#). If you have any queries, please email [FSM@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:FSM@shropshire.gov.uk), or speak to your child's school.

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