

18 June 2026

Dear Parent/Carer,

Free School Meals and Financial Assistance

The rules for benefits-based Free School Meals (FSM) in England are undergoing a major restructuring starting in September 2026 (the 2026/27 academic year).

The government is removing the old £7,400 net earnings cap for families on Universal Credit. However, there is a catch regarding "transitional protections" that you need to know about.

[You can find out if you qualify by using this link](#)

The official Department for Education (DfE) guidance outlines exactly what is changing and how it works.

In this letter we will explain what is changing and most importantly what you need to do now if you think your child should qualify for Free School Meals.

1. The New Two-Tier System

Starting in September 2026, eligibility will be split into two distinct categories. If you receive **any level of Universal Credit** (even just £1), your child will qualify for free meals, but the tier dictates what extra support you get.

Tier	Who Qualifies?	What do you get?
Targeted FSM	Households on Universal Credit earning £7,400 or less per year (or on legacy benefits like Income Support/ESA).	Free daily school meals Pupil Premium funding for your school
Expanded FSM (New)	Households on Universal Credit earning more than £7,400 per year.	Free daily school meals only Does not automatically trigger extra school funding.

Note on Younger Children: All children in Reception, Year 1, and Year 2 in England will still automatically receive free meals under the Universal Infant Free School Meals policy, regardless of household income.

2. The End of "Transitional Protections"

Since 2018, if a child became eligible for free school meals, their status was "protected", meaning they kept getting free meals until the end of their current school phase, even if their parents got a better paid job and stopped qualifying for benefits.

Those protections officially end on 1 September 2026.

Moving forward, eligibility will be re-checked annually ahead of the October school census. If your household stops receiving Universal Credit or other qualifying benefits, your child will lose their free school meal status at the end of that academic year.

3. What You Need to Do Now

Because the system is resetting, you cannot rely on an old application rolling over automatically. Local authorities and schools are instructing parents to take action ahead of the new term:

- **Apply/Reapply Early:** [Applications for the new system](#) opened on 1 June 2026. Even if your child currently gets free meals, check with your local council or school to see if you need to reapply to confirm your tier. **You must do this as soon as possible and before Thursday 3 September 2026 to ensure that your child can access Free School Meals from the start of Term 1.**
- **If You Were Previously Rejected:** If you applied in the past and were turned down because you earned slightly more than the £7,400 limit, you should [reapply immediately](#). As long as you receive Universal Credit, you will be approved under the new Expanded FSM tier for September. **You should do this as soon as possible and before Thursday 3 September 2026 so that your child can access Free School Meals from the start of Term 1.**
- **Gather Your Details:** To [apply through your local council's online portal](#), you will just need your National Insurance Number (or National Asylum Support Service number) and your date of birth. The portal checks your live Universal Credit status automatically.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to get into contact with us by emailing FSM@smrt.bristol.sch.uk

Yours faithfully,

Karuna Duzniak

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