

Changes to Free School Meals eligibility is changing from 1st September 2026

The government has updated the Free School Meals (FSM) system to help support more families. The eligibility rules have been expanded, meaning **an additional 500,000 children** across the country will now be able to receive free school meals.

To help you understand how these updates affect your family, the system is now divided into two categories: **Targeted FSM** and **Expanded FSM**.

From 1st September 2026 Free School Meals eligibility is changing.

Targeted FSM (The Existing System)

Targeted Free School Meals

Currently households in receipt of Universal Credit with annual household net earnings of £7,400 or less are eligible for Free School Meals. These are known as Targeted Free School Meals.

If you are eligible for Targeted Free School Meals;

- Your child/children can have Free School Meals
- They may be eligible for additional support, such as the holiday activities and food programme (HAF) and the 'extended rights' element of school travel assistance.
- The school will get pupil premium and other valuable funding for each eligible child.

If you are already getting Free School Meals, and you think you are still eligible, you do not need to reapply. DMBC will be performing rechecks over the summer, and if you are still eligible, Free School Meals for your child/children will continue and we will notify the school ready for 1 September 2026.

Expanded Free School Meals

Households receiving Universal Credit from 1 June 2026 with annual household earnings exceeding £7,400 will be eligible for Expanded Free School Meals from 1 September 2026.

- Your child/children can have a Free School Meal only.
- Expanded Free School Meals does not attract additional support, such as the holiday activities and food programme (HAF) and the 'extended rights' element of school travel assistance.
- The school will not get pupil premium and other funding.

Your child will be eligible for free school meals if you are receiving one of the following benefits or support:

- Universal Credit - Your annual net earned income must be no more than £7,400, as assessed by earnings from up to 3 of your most recent assessment periods.
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: "I already get Free School Meals. Do I need to do anything?"

No. If your child is already registered and receiving Free School Meals under the £7,400 income threshold, your meals are completely safe. You are automatically moved into the "Targeted FSM" category, and your meals will continue as normal.

Question: "I was previously told my income was too high. Should I apply now?"

Yes. If you receive Universal Credit but your annual earnings are higher than £7,400, you are highly likely to qualify under the new **Expanded FSM** rules. We strongly encourage you to apply so your child can start receiving free meals.

Question: "What is Universal Free School Meals?"

All children in reception, year 1 or year 2 are automatically entitled to receive a free school meal without you submitting an online application. This is regardless of your income and circumstances and includes Local Authority maintained schools, academies and free schools.

However, if you are in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits listed above you should still complete an online application as the school is entitled to receive the Pupil Premium for your child. If you do not submit an online form the school cannot apply for the Pupil Premium.

The Pupil Premium is a grant provided by the government for every child that has the right to a free school meal based on the qualifying benefits above and is;

- £1,515 per school year, for each eligible pupil from Reception to Year 6, or
- £1075 per school year for each eligible pupil from Years 7 to Year 11

The money is used to support individual pupils and the whole school community.

If you receive one of the qualifying benefits but you don't want your child to receive a free school meal, we would ask you to still apply so that your child's school receives as much funding as possible.

Question: "How do I apply for free school meals?"

Even if your child does not want free school meals, you should still make a request. This is because you may be entitled to other benefits for your child, for example, free school milk for children under seven, or help towards board and lodging charges for school trips.

Online application

If you meet the criteria, an online request, normally by the parent or guardian of the child, has to be made before the council can provide free school meals. **Please note: if the school your child attends is not listed on our form, then you need to contact that school directly to apply for Free School Meals.**

<https://www.doncaster.gov.uk/doitonline/free-school-meals>

You will have to pay for any school meals your child has before we receive your application, but see the **Universal infant free school meals** section below.

You can apply for free school meals up to a maximum of two months before your child starts school.

What happens when we receive your application

Once you have applied for free school meals,

- we aim to deal with your request within 3 working days
- when you apply online, your entitlement to free school meals will be checked automatically as part of the online process
- in most cases this is all we need but, if we are unable to confirm your entitlement using this service, we will contact you for more information
- once we have dealt with your application we will send you a letter confirming your entitlement to free school meals
- we will also send an email to your child's school the morning after we process your application to let them know that your child can start having free school meals

Question: "What happens if my circumstances change?"

If your child becomes eligible for Free School Meals, they will continue to be eligible until the end of Universal Credit roll out.

This is regardless of any changes in your circumstances and means that you do not need to tell us if your circumstances change.

You only need to tell us if you want to withdraw your application for Free School Meals.

You can contact us;

- by emailing FSM@doncaster.gov.uk
- by phoning 01302 735336, option 1
- by visiting the Civic Office, Waterdale, Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5.00pm, excluding bank holidays.