



16<sup>th</sup> June 2026

Dear Parents/Carers

## **Important Changes to Free School Meals from September 2026**

We are writing to let you know about important changes to Free School Meals (FSM) and school funding that will come into effect in September 2026. These changes may affect your family. Please read this letter carefully. If you have any questions, please contact the school office and we will be happy to help.

### **What Is Changing?**

From September 2026, the government is expanding who can get free school meals. Currently, free school meals are available to families who receive Universal Credit and whose household income is £7,400 a year or less. From September 2026, the £7,400 income limit will be removed. This means that all children in households receiving Universal Credit will be entitled to a free school meal, regardless of household income. The government estimates that more than 500,000 additional children across England will benefit from this change.

### **Two Types of Free School Meals from September 2026**

#### **1. Targeted Free School Meals**

For families receiving Universal Credit with a household income of £7,400 or less per year. This is the same as the current rules. Pupils in this group also help the school receive additional government funding called *Pupil Premium*.

#### **2. Expanded Free School Meals**

A new category for families receiving Universal Credit whose income is above £7,400 per year. These pupils will receive a free meal but will **not** attract Pupil Premium funding for the school. If you are unsure which category applies to your family, please contact us and we will help you check.

### **What Is the Pupil Premium?**

The Pupil Premium is extra funding the government gives to schools to support pupils who may be at a disadvantage. It is used to provide additional academic support, enrichment activities, and pastoral and wellbeing provision. This funding is linked to pupils who qualify for Targeted Free School Meals, or who have done so at any point in the past six years. Pupils who qualify only under the new Expanded Free School Meals category will not attract this funding. This is why it is important that all eligible families apply, so we can correctly identify which category your child falls into.



### **What Is Ending: Transitional Protection**

Since 2018, some children have continued to receive free school meals even if their family's income or circumstances changed. This is known as *transitional protection*. This protection will end at the close of the 2025–2026 academic year. From September 2026, eligibility will depend on your family's current circumstances at the time of the eligibility check.

If your child currently receives free school meals under these older rules, we recommend checking whether you meet the new criteria. Most families currently protected are expected to remain eligible because they are still receiving Universal Credit.

### **How to Apply**

The schools free school meal application is available here:

<https://apply.cloudforedu.org.uk/ofsm/southampton>

The eligibility check is quick and gives an immediate result. You will need your National Insurance number. **Please note:** the application system has been updated from 1 June 2026 to reflect the new eligibility rules.

### **What Do You Need to Do?**

Please read the points below and take action if they apply to you:

- If you think you may now be eligible for the first time, please apply through the link provided above. You can also contact the school office for support.
- If your child currently receives free school meals, we recommend checking your eligibility again from June 2026 onwards to ensure this continues in September. Schools will recheck eligibility once a year.
- If your child receives a free meal in Reception, Year 1 or Year 2, this is provided under a separate government scheme. Please still apply for free school meals separately it helps the school access Pupil Premium funding.
- If you are unsure whether you are eligible, you can still submit an application

### **What Happens Next?**

We encourage all families who think they may qualify to apply as soon as possible so that everything is in place for the start of the autumn term. We understand that these changes involve a number of details, and we want to make this process as straightforward as possible. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

**Yours sincerely,**



Mrs L Phillips  
Headteacher