

2 July 2026

Education

Floor 4, Core 1
Civic Offices
Guildhall Square
Portsmouth
Hants
PO1 2EA

Dear Parent / carer

Free school meals

There will be changes to free school meals (FSM) from September 2026.

What is changing?

Expanded entitlement for families on Universal Credit:

From September 2026, all children in households receiving Universal Credit will be entitled to free school meals, regardless of earnings.

There will be two types of eligibility:

- **Targeted FSM:** for households on a low-income, earning £7,400 pa or less (less than £616.67 per month from employment, after deductions)
- **Expanded FSM:** for households in receipt of universal credit, earning above £7,400pa (more than £616.67 per month from employment, after deductions)

Families with no recourse to public funds may also be eligible for Targeted FSM subject to meeting separate criteria.

All children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 will continue to be entitled to a free lunch at school, regardless of family circumstances.

End of 'Protected' FSM:

Since 2018, some children have continued to receive Protected free school meals, even if their family income increased. This was called transitional protection.

Protected FSMs will finish in July 2026, at the end of the current school year.

This means some children may **no longer be eligible** from September 2026 if their family does not receive Universal Credit or another qualifying benefit.

What happens next?

At the Council, we will check the Free School Meal eligibility for every parent / carer who has previously applied to the Council.

We will write to you during the summer to explain your new FSM entitlement.

In most cases, you will not need to reapply for free school meals.

You only need to apply for free school meals if:

- Your child is starting school in Year R in September 2026 (if you haven't already completed the application form)
- Your child has moved from a school outside Portsmouth
- Your child has moved to a new school from Ark Ayrton, Ark Dickens or Ark Charter

Here is the link to the FSM application: [Free school meals - Portsmouth City Council](#)

Not sure?

If you are unsure whether you need to apply or if your circumstances have changed, please contact:

- freeschoolmeal@portsmouthcc.gov.uk
- or your child's school

Yours sincerely,

The Access & Entitlement Team

Education Department

Portsmouth City Council