Free school meals are expanding

From September 2026

What's changing?

Current eligibility

Most families receiving Universal Credit qualify for income-based free school meals (FSM) only if their annual earned income is £7,400 or less (excluding benefits).

From September 2026

All children in households receiving Universal Credit will become eligible for free school meals.

Free school meals categories

Targeted free school meals - Available to families who:

- Receive Universal Credit and earn **£7,400 or less per year** (excluding benefits), or
- Receive certain qualifying benefits, including:
  - Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
  - Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit)
  - Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

Expanded free school meals - Available to:

- All other families receiving Universal Credit, regardless of earnings.

This means all children in Universal Credit households will be eligible for free school meals from September 2026.

Important dates

Applications open:
1 August 2026

Expanded eligibility starts:
1 September 2026

Please note: Applications can be submitted from 1 August 2026, but meals under the expanded scheme cannot begin before 1 September 2026.

What does this mean?

Targeted free school meals children:

- ✓ Free school meals at school in term time
- ✓ Funded Holiday Activities (HAF)
- ✓ Pupil Premium for child's school

Expanded free school meals

- ✓ Free school meals at school during term time
- ✗ Funded Holiday Activities (HAF)

Who will benefit?

- More families receiving Universal Credit
- More students accessing a healthy meal during the school day
- Reduced pressure on household budgets

Find out more or apply: ***nottinghamshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals***

Nottinghamshire County Council