

19 May 2026

To All Schools

Update regarding free school meals changes, for schools using the Suffolk County Council Free School Meals (FSM) Entitlement Checking Service.

In addition to the DfE's [Free school meals: guidance for schools and local authorities - GOV.UK](#), please see below for a summary of the current situation regarding FSM.

Two types of income-assessed FSM (from September 2026)

There will be two types of income-assessed FSM:

- **Targeted FSM**, which continues to be based on the existing threshold, covering pupils who are in households in receipt of Universal Credit with annual household earnings of £7,400 or less.
- **Expanded FSM**, a new category covering pupils who do not qualify for targeted FSM, but who are in households receiving Universal Credit.

Only pupils in receipt of **Targeted FSM** will be eligible for:

- Pupil premium funding for schools
- Holiday and Activity Fund programme
- School travel under extended rights.

Transitional protections will end. Claims will no longer be protected until the end of the current phase of education.

In the meantime, we ask schools to inform parents that they **should not submit FSM applications until after 8 June 2026 for a September start**. This ensures the applications are checked against both the *targeted* and *expanded* criteria, maximising eligibility.

Rechecking of entitlement and new census requirements

- All FSM claims must now be rechecked annually. If a pupil is no longer eligible, FSM must end at the end of the relevant school year.
- Under new [census guidance](#), schools must record:
 - the FSM entitlement type, i.e. targeted or expanded and
 - the 'last verified' date (the date entitlement was last checked).
- If a valid verification date is missing from the census return, the pupil will not be counted as eligible, leading to a loss of funding.

For schools that buy into Suffolk County Council's (SCC) FSM service:

- Whilst we are still seeking clarification from the DfE on some details, be assured that we will be updating our systems, processes and reports to meet the new requirements.
- We will:
 - carry out annual entitlement checks on your behalf;
 - notify schools of any eligibility changes and provide the school with the eligibility type, for you to record in your systems and census returns.
 - Update your FSM lists to reflect these changes.
- Our website and application process is being updated.
- We will, where possible, also continue to transfer valid FSM claims for pupils moving between schools that use SCC's FSM service, without requiring a new parent application. We will notify schools of their new eligibility status.
- As transitional protection ends on 31 August 2026, a free school meal can only be provided from September once a parent has made a successful application through our web-based application form. A meal **cannot** be provided simply due to them having previously received one, their sibling being in receipt of one, or because the Common Transfer File (CTF) or Get Information About Pupils (GIAP) record shows they were previously in receipt of a free meal.

We will provide further guidance and timescales to schools via Suffolk Headlines or directly via email as soon as we receive clarification from the DfE.

Kind regards

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