



Dear Parents / Carers,

Expanded entitlement to Free School Meals – GOOD NEWS!!

From the start of the 2026 to 2027 academic year, all children from households in receipt of Universal Credit will be entitled to receive a FREE SCHOOL MEAL. This is due to the expanded entitlement which the government have made a legal requirement through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 and we believe is **very good news for families!**

Going forward, there will be 2 categories of benefits-based free school meals:

- **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. Pupils entitled to Targeted FSM will be able to have free school meals and free milk.
- **Expanded FSM**, a new category covering pupils who do not qualify for targeted FSM, but who are in households receiving Universal Credit, regardless of household earnings. Pupils entitled to Expanded FSM will be able to have free school meals only.

Annual re-checks will be required to ensure that the entitlement to FSM continues.

What parents/carers need to do now?

We have been advised to ask you to make an application through the NCC portal from mid-July and BEFORE the end of this school year so that all eligible pupils are ready to receive free school meals from the start of the academic year. This includes any pupils currently in Early Years or due to start Nursery/Reception from September 2026.

All new applications for free school meals should be made online through Northumberland County Council's Citizen Portal. The link on the local authority's website will direct parents to the Citizen Portal log-in page.

- *Parents who already have their own log-in can sign in and make a free school meals application.*
- *New applicants must first register on the Portal before they can access the free school meals application.*

Eligibility will be checked, and parents will receive confirmation of whether:

- the application is successful, and their child(ren) is eligible to free school meals.

Or alternatively:

- the application is unsuccessful, because
 - they are ineligible
 - it has not been possible to check eligibility, and they should try again
 - the application is incomplete
 - further information is required

If you have any questions about this or problems with making an application through the NCC portal, please contact Mrs Johnson in the school office who will do her best to guide you through the process. We have also included the answers to some questions which we think may be raised about this new process overleaf.

Yours sincerely,

Miss E Beeston, Head Teacher

P.T.O.

See the FAQs listed below.

My child will be in Reception / Year 1 / Year 2 and will get a free school meal anyway (Universal free school meals), so do I need to apply?

Yes. Even if your child will be in Reception/Year 1/Year 2 it is important you apply so that the FREE meals your child is entitled to will be available (*as we do not know what changes might occur with the current system of universal free meals for children in these classes*).

I only receive a very small amount of Universal Credit, is it worth me making a claim?

Yes. The new expanded FSM category is for families in receipt of any amount of Universal Credit however small.

My child is already entitled to benefit based FSM. Do I have to make another claim?

No. Northumberland County Council will automatically recheck existing FSM claimants but parents, particularly those on Universal Credit, can check their eligibility online via Northumberland County Council's Citizen's Portal.

My child will be in Nursery next year. Can I make a claim?

Yes. Full day Nursery pupils may also be eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), and parents can make an application in the same way as for older children.

I have a younger child starting Eastlea, can they be added to an existing FSM claim.

No. Siblings of FSM claimants cannot be 'added' to an existing claim. A new separate claim will need to be made for younger children starting Eastlea.