



Davington Primary School



Changes to Free School Meals

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 has extended eligibility to receive Free School Meals (FSM) to all children from households in receipt of Universal Credit from the start of the 2026-27 academic year.

The DFE guidance sets out the key changes, which are summarised below.

What is changing?

Starting in September 2026, the Department for Education is expanding Free School Meals (FSM) to all families on Universal Credit, removing the strict £7,400 income cap for meals.

Transitional protections from previous years will end in the summer, making regular eligibility checks mandatory.

Categories of FSM

The expansion creates two distinct tiers of free school meal eligibility:

- **Targeted FSM:** For households with an annual income of **£7,400 or less** (after tax, excluding benefits). This category qualifies your child for a free school meal and additional benefits related to Pupil Premium.
- **Expanded FSM:** Covers all household in receipt of Universal Credit and earnings **above £7,400**. Children will receive a free school meal.

Changes to Transitional Protections

Transitional protections, which have been in place since 1 April 2018, will end. If your child was previously receiving FSM simply by keeping "transitional protections" even when your income increased or your circumstances changed, those protections will officially end at the end of the 2025/26 academic year

- You must meet the ongoing criteria ahead of the new school year to continue receiving free school meals.



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Automatic Eligibility vs Application

- **All Universal Credit Claimants:** You are now covered under the new rules. It is important to note that while eligibility will be automatically granted to all Universal Credit recipients, you will still need to apply to receive the benefit.
- **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF):** Children in households with NRPF may still qualify for FSM, subject to maximum income thresholds.

How to Apply

To ensure your child receives their meals in September, you should register using the Kent County Council Free School Meals portal:

[Apply for free school meals - Kent County Council](#)

Key things to remember:

- **When to apply:** The KCC portal is now accepting applications for the new Expanded FSM starting in September. If you may be eligible we encourage you to apply as soon as possible to avoid any delays in receiving free meals on their first day of term in September.
- **Moving from Year 2 to Year 3:** If your child is moving to Year 3 in September, free school meals are no longer universal. If you may be eligible, you must submit a new application for income-related free school meals to continue receiving them.
- **If you are already receiving Free School Meals:** If your child is already approved and your financial or personal circumstances have not changed, you will not need to reapply.

All existing eligible applications will be automatically re-checked annually.