

June 2026

Dear Parent/Carer

Important Update – 2026/27 Changes for Free School Meals (FSM)

We are writing to share an important national update about Free School Meals (FSM) and to encourage all families to check their eligibility.

The Education Act 1996 places a duty on maintained schools, academies and free schools to provide free school meals (FSM) to pupils of all ages that meet the criteria.

What has changed?

From the start of the 2026 to 2027 academic year, **all children from households in receipt of Universal Credit** attending these schools **will be entitled to receive a free meal**. This means that **many more families will now qualify**, even if they have not been eligible before.

Why this is important?

If your child is eligible for Free School Meals:

- They will receive free, nutritious meals every school day.
- The school will receive additional funding (**Pupil Premium**) to support your child's education, wellbeing and wider enrichment. This funding helps us provide extra support such as interventions, resources and enrichment opportunities.

Who is eligible for benefits based free school meals?

From the start of the 2026 to 2027 academic year, the government is expanding FSM eligibility to all children from households in receipt of Universal Credit regardless of household earnings. Free school meals are available to pupils in receipt of, or whose parents are in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits:

- Universal Credit
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

A pupil is only eligible to receive a free school meal where both:

- a claim for this support has been made

- their eligibility has been verified by the school where they are enrolled or by the local authority

Households may also be entitled to a meal if they:

- are in receipt of income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- receive the guarantee element of Pension Credit
- meet criteria set out in separate guidance for [families with no recourse to public funds](#)

Auto-enrolment

Bedford Borough Council have been working on implementing an auto enrolment scheme for Free School meals, where they automatically check families' details to determine whether they are eligible for Free School Meals. All families of pupils currently eligible to benefits related free school meals, at Bedford Borough schools, will have their entitlement re-checked over the Summer.

What you need to do

We kindly ask all parents/carers to complete a quick online application through Bedford Borough Council: [Apply for free school meals - Contact Information - Section 1 - Bedford Borough Council](#). This allows Bedford Borough to check whether your child is eligible for free school meals.

Although Bedford Borough will carry out regular auto-enrolment eligibility checks, there may be occasions where some families need to apply for free school meals between checks, for example:

- if your circumstances change unexpectedly
- if you move into Bedford Borough
- if you think your child might be eligible but you have not heard from Bedford Borough

If you think that your child might be eligible and Bedford Borough checks may not have found this, you will need to complete an application.

When you apply, you can opt in to the **automatic eligibility checking service**.

This means:

- Your eligibility will be **checked regularly**
- Your child will be **automatically registered** if your circumstances change
- This ensures you never miss out on support you are entitled to.

Registering allows the school to receive **additional funding to support your child now and in the future**.

Need help?

If you would like support with your application, please contact Mr Roopnarain:
roopnarains@goldington.beds.sch.uk - we can support with this process.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely

Sailesh Roopnarain
Assistant Headteacher (Pupil Premium)