



11th September 2026

Dear Parent/Carer

Important Changes to Free School Meals from September 2026

As part of initiatives to tackle child poverty, the Government is expanding the eligibility for Free School Meals to all households in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) from September 2026. Up to now, eligibility was limited to those eligible to UC with income below £7,400 or those covered by the transitional protection. With this measure, the Government expects that about 500,000 more children will benefit from free meals across the country. At the same time, there will be a decoupling of FSM eligibility and pupil premium eligibility and the end of the transitional protection.

This means there will be two categories of FSM students from September 2026:

- Targeted FSM for families in receipt of Universal Credit with earnings of £7,400 or less. These students will get the free school meal plus pupil premium.
- Expanded FSM for families in receipt of Universal Credit with earnings above the income threshold (£7,400). These students will get the free school meal only.

Transitional protections for Free School Meals have been in effect since April 2018. This has meant that students becoming eligible for free meals under the benefits-based criteria have retained their entitlement, even if their household earnings improved above the threshold. From the start of this current academic year, transitional protections for FSM will end and households must meet the FSM eligibility criteria to continue receiving provision. This means that we will now be required to check all FSM entitlements annually. Any families no longer eligible to this funding from this September have now been informed.

We apologise if there has been some confusion regarding eligibility since our return this term. Our system is now up to date with both targeted and expanded eligible students.

Please see [Free school meals entitlement | Bedford Borough Council](#) for more information, or if you wish to apply.

If you are now eligible for Free School Meals and our system was not updated immediately we will check and credit this balance from your account. A letter will be sent to you confirming your new eligibility.

Daily Allowance

A daily Free School Meal allowance of £3 will be applied to eligible student accounts on Vericool. Students can use this throughout the day on food purchases only. If students would like to purchase drinks or go

above that allowance during the day then accounts must be topped up by parents/carers to cover this. There are water fountains with cups available in the canteen areas if a drink is required. Any unspent daily allowance is not carried forward to the following day.

Breakfast

Free School Meal students are eligible for a daily free breakfast choice of toast, fruit and/or yogurt. This does not impact on their daily allowance for break and lunchtime. If your child would like to use this facility the canteen is open for breakfast to all students from 7.45am – 8.20am.

Water bottles

All students should have their own refillable water bottles with them on a daily basis. There are water fountains around the site for students to access at social times to refill their bottles.

We hope that this answers any questions that you have regarding changes to the Free School Meals.

Yours faithfully,

Mrs J Simmonds
Business Manager