

FREE SCHOOL MEALS

From September 2026, there will be three types of free school meals entitlement.

What's Changing

At present around 10,500 children and young people in Cheshire West & Chester are entitled to free school meals. All children and young people once registered for free school meals have continued to have this additional support until they finish school, even if family circumstances have changed. There will be some changes to this from the end of this academic year (July 2026). From September 2026, some children may no longer be entitled to free school meals. Additionally, some families may become eligible for free meals for the first time.



The 3 types of Free School Meals

1. Targeted Free School Meals (TFSM)

Who qualifies

- Children and young people in families receiving Universal Credit with annual household income under £7,400 (£616.67/month).
- Families with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

This gives access to

- Free school meals at school during term-time.
- Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme.
- Other support that may be available at school.
- Free board and lodging on residential trips.

Funding

- Schools do not receive specific funding for these meals.
- Schools receive FSM Pupil Premium funding for these claims.

Eligibility Checks

- Eligibility will be checked in line with Government guidance.
- Eligible applicants remain eligible for the full academic year.

2. Expanded FREE School Meals (EFSM)

New criteria from September 2026

Who qualifies

- Children and young people in families receiving Universal Credit
- No limit on annual household income

This gives access to

- Free school meals at school during term-time

This doesn't give access to

- HAF (unless through other criteria e.g. SEND, social care)
- Other support linked to TFSM

Funding

- Schools do not receive specific funding for these meals.
- Schools will not receive FSM Pupil Premium funding for these claims.

Eligibility Checks

- Eligibility will be checked in line with Government guidance.
- Eligible applicants remain eligible for the full academic year.

3. Universal Infant Free School Meals

Available since September 2014

Who qualifies

- All children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 attending school, regardless of family circumstances

This gives access to

- Free school meals at school during term-time

This doesn't give access to

- HAF (unless through other criteria e.g. SEND, social care).
- Other support linked to TFSM.

Funding

- Schools receive Government funding towards the cost of these meals.
- Schools do not receive FSM Pupil Premium funding for these children, unless they are recorded as TFSM.

Eligibility checks

- Eligibility checks are not required for UIFSM (eligibility should still be checked for TFSM/EFSM).

WHAT PARENTS/CARERS NEED TO DO

Parents of children already on FSM do not need to take any action as their eligibility will be updated automatically around the criteria above.

If you haven't already, please provide your details to your child's school.

- Your child's school will let you know if they need any more information from you.
- Your details are usually requested when your child starts or moves school.
- Most parents/carers have already provided the details needed for checking

If you have any questions, please contact your child's school or visit [Free school meals | Cheshire West and Chester Council](#) for more information.

For more information

