

Friday 4<sup>th</sup> July 2025

Dear Parent/Carer,

## **Changes to Free School Meal (FSM) Eligibility and Protections**

We are writing to inform you of important changes to the national guidance on Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility, which may affect your child now or in the future.

You may be aware that in previous government guidance, it was announced that from 1 April 2025, children who became newly eligible for FSM and those who had previously had protected FSM status during the Universal Credit rollout would only be entitled to support until the end of their current phase of education (e.g. primary or secondary school). This meant that eligibility would need to be reassessed when children moved to a new school phase, potentially leading to loss of entitlement if household circumstances had changed. However, we are pleased to share that this guidance has now changed.

### **What's New?**

The Department for Education has now confirmed that all pupils who became eligible for free school meals on or after 1 April 2018 will continue to be protected until at least 1 September 2026, regardless of changes in household circumstances (e.g. income increases). This means:

- If your child becomes eligible for FSM at any point up to the end of the 2025/26 school year, they will continue to receive free school meals until at least September 2026, even if your circumstances change in the meantime.
- From September 2026, these transitional protections will end, and all eligibility will be based on current household circumstances at that time.
- Further guidance will be provided by the government closer to this date which we will communicate with you.

We understand this change may be confusing, especially as the previous guidance was not formally communicated to families. Please rest assured that your child's current entitlement to free school meals remains in place under these extended protections.

### **Who is eligible for free school meals?**

Children are eligible for FSM if you receive one of the following benefits:

- Universal Credit (with annual net earned income of £7,400 or less)
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guarantee element of Pension Credit

- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and your gross income is £16,190 or less)
- Working Tax Credit run-on (paid for four weeks after stopping Working Tax Credit)

### **What do parents need to do?**

If you think you may now be eligible for FSM and have not yet applied, we encourage you to check your eligibility and apply online here:

Sheffield schools: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/schools-childcare/school-meals>

Derbyshire schools: <https://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/education/schools/your-child-at-school/meals/school-meals/free-school-meals.aspx>

**Please note:** Applications for free school meals must be made to the local authority where your child's school is located, *not* the authority where you live.

It's quick and easy to apply online using the links above, but if you would like us to apply on your behalf, please come to the school office and a member of staff will be happy to help.

Applying for FSM could provide your child with a daily meal at school and also allows the school to access additional funding to support your child's education.

If you already receive FSM for your child, you **do not need to do anything** at this stage. Your child's entitlement is protected until at least September 2026.

We hope this provides clarity, but if you have any questions or would like support with your application, please don't hesitate to contact the school office.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Emma Hardy'.

**Mrs Emma Hardy**  
Headteacher