

Free School Meal Eligibility and Enrolment Changes from September 2026

From September 2026, the Department for Education (DfE) will change the eligibility criteria for free school meals:

- All households on Universal Credit will qualify. **Income limits will no longer apply.** This is expected to reach 500,000 additional children nationally.
- Free school meal entitlement will no longer be 'protected' once awarded. Instead, **eligibility will be checked at the start of each new school year.**

To support this, Cornwall Council will introduce an 'Auto Award' system:

- **All existing claims will be rechecked before the start of each new academic year**
- Checks will also run each term to find pupils who have become eligible
- If a family's situation changes between checks, they can still apply [Apply for Free School Meals Parent Portal](#)

Cornwall council will send the families who are potentially eligible a letter explaining:

- what free school meals are
- the benefits of these
- their plan to run the eligibility checker against their details

The letter is planned to be sent in August and will also explain how families can opt out if you prefer they do not do this.

Schools have been asked to support this change by checking that parental responsibility and contact details we hold are accurate. We will be contacting all parents shortly to check details are up to date.

In the meantime, families can check their eligibility for free school meals at any time by visiting the [Apply for Free School Meals Parent Portal](#)