

Free school meals

A quick guide for parents and carers – information from September 2026

Free school meals can help with the cost of living. The scheme also makes sure children can have a healthy meal during the school day. This helps them focus in class, stay well and supports their learning. This leaflet explains the different types of free school meals, who can get them, and how to apply.



At a glance

- **Reception to Year 2:** all children can have free school meals automatically through Universal Infant Free School Meals. You may also be eligible for Targeted or Expanded free school meals.
- **From Year 3:** some children can get free school meals through Targeted or Expanded free school meals – you usually need to apply
- **Applying can help your school:** if you qualify for Targeted free school meals, your child's school will get extra funding (called pupil premium).



What are the benefits of applying?

- We will check your eligibility now and re-check on a weekly basis to see if you have become eligible
- This means your child can get free school meals as soon as the DWP make any changes to your record
- Your child's school may also get extra funding to help support their children

Types of free school meals

Universal Infant Free School Meals (Reception to Year 2)

- Your child gets a free school lunch if they are in **Reception, Year 1 or Year 2**.
- **No application is needed** for Universal Infant meals.
- Even so, it can still be worth applying for **Targeted** or **Expanded** free school meals, because your child's school will receive extra funding if you qualify for **Targeted** meals.
- If you apply and qualify, you usually won't need to reapply when your child moves into Year 3 (unless your name changes).

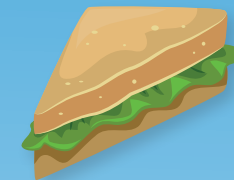
Targeted free school meals

Targeted free school meals are for children whose parents/carers meet the government's eligibility rules.

- **Example** (not a full list): you may qualify if you are on **Universal Credit** and your household income is under **£7,400** a year (after tax and not including benefits).

Key points

- **You must apply.**
- If eligible, your child gets free meals and the school will get extra funding (pupil premium).
- Eligibility usually lasts until the **end of the school year**. We check again each year.



Expanded free school meals (from September 2026)

Expanded free school meals are for children whose parents/carers receive Universal Credit.

Key points

- **You must apply.**
- Eligibility usually lasts until the **end of the school year**. We check again each year.
- Schools do not receive extra funding through Expanded free school meals.

Transitional protection (ending 31 August 2026)

- Some children have had "transitional protection" since April 2018, which meant they kept free meals for a set period.
- This protection is planned to end in **September 2026**.
- Children will be checked again in **summer 2026** and then each year, in line with the new rules.

What happens after you apply

- We check your details with the **Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)**.
- If the DWP confirms that you are eligible, we will record this and let you and the school know.
- If we can't confirm your details, we may contact you for **more information**.
- We recheck eligibility regularly, including a check for all eligible applications **once each summer**.



Auto-enrolment (some families)

- In some cases, we can check whether families may be eligible for **Targeted** free school meals.
- We use information from **Council Tax Reduction** and compare it with DWP data.
- If your family is included, we will **write to you**. You can choose to opt out by following the instructions in the letter.
- If your child becomes eligible, we will write and **let you know**.

How to apply

What you'll need

- Your details (name, address, and date of birth)
 - Your National Insurance number or NASS number
 - Your child's details and school
1. **Apply online** using the Citizen's Portal:
newcastlelea.org/CitizenPortal_LIVE/en
 - You can get an instant response
 - You can apply for more than one child at the same time
 2. **Or apply by paper form (ask your child's school)**



Need help or more information?

Talk to your child's school, or contact the School Admissions and Information Team at **admissions.information@newcastle.gov.uk** or call **0191 278 7878** (ask for School Admissions). Phone lines are open 9.00am to 2.30pm.

