

June 2026



**THE
COWPLAIN
SCHOOL**

Dear Parent/Carer

Principal
Mr IR Gates MA NPQH

Guidance for changes to Free School Meals

This letter explains upcoming changes to eligibility for benefits based Free School Meals (FSM). It also outlines what you need to do to apply or check your child's eligibility.

Upcoming Changes

From September 2026, the eligibility criteria for Free School Meals will change. All households receiving Universal Credit will be included, but eligibility will be divided into two groups:

- **Targeted Free School Meals**
For households receiving Universal Credit with an annual income below £7,400.
 - **Expanded Free School Meals**
For households receiving Universal Credit with an annual income above £7,400.
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What You Need to Do

- If your child already receives Free School Meals and you have applied through the Hampshire portal, you do not need to do anything.
- If you think your child may now be eligible, please submit an application through the Hampshire portal for **The Cowplain School**.

[Online FSM Application](#)

Please note: children eligible under the **expanded criteria** will only begin to receive Free School Meals from **September 2026**.

If You Disagree with a Decision

If you have applied and believe the decision is incorrect, please contact finance@cowplainschool.co.uk who can contact Hampshire County Council on your behalf to request further advice.

Transitional Protections (until August 2026)

Transitional protections have been in place since 1 April 2018 and will continue until the end of the 2025 to 2026 school year.

During this time:

- Any child who becomes eligible for benefits based Free School Meals will continue to receive them until July 2026.
- This will not change even if household income increases.

From **September 2026**, these protections will end. From this point, all families must meet the new eligibility rules for their child to receive Free School Meals.

For more information on Free School Meals please follow this link to the Government Website - [Apply for free school meals - GOV.UK](#)

Yours faithfully

Mrs L Sale
Chief Financial Officer

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