Weldon CE Primary School

Chapel Road
Weldon, Corby, NN17 3HP
www.weldonceprimary.co.uk
Telephone: 01536 265288

LEARNING AND FLOURISHING TOGETHER PDET

Principal – Lesley Middleton, BA (Hons), NPQH
head@weldon.pdet.org.uk

Changes to Free School Meals from September 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are writing to let you know about an important change to free school meals that takes effect from September 2026. The change means more families than ever will be able to claim a free, healthy lunch for their child – but it also means that everyone's eligibility will be checked again, so we would ask all families to read this letter carefully and take action if it applies to you.

What is changing
From September 2026, the government is widening who can get free school meals. Any child whose household receives Universal Credit will be able to get a free school meal, whatever the household's income. Until now, a household income limit applied (around £7,400 a year, not counting benefits), which meant some families on Universal Credit could not claim. That limit is being removed, so many more children will now qualify.

The two types of free school meal
From September 2026 there will be two types of benefits-based free school meal. Both give your child a free lunch every school day:

- Targeted – for households on Universal Credit earning £7,400 a year or less, and for families receiving certain other benefits.
- Expanded – for households on Universal Credit earning more than £7,400 a year.

Please note that some other forms of support – such as the holiday activities and food programme that runs in the school holidays – continue to use the lower income criteria. This means that qualifying for a free school meal does not automatically mean your child qualifies for every other scheme.

Why we are asking everyone to check
Up to now, some children have continued to receive free school meals under "transitional protections," even where their family's circumstances had changed. These protections come to an end at the close of the current 2025/26 school year. From September 2026, eligibility will be based on the new rules, and we will need to re-check the eligibility of every child currently receiving free meals annually.

For most families this is good news, and more children will qualify than before. However, a small number of families who do not meet the new criteria – for example, where the household is no longer receiving Universal Credit – may find their child is no longer eligible. If your child currently receives free school meals, their entitlement will continue until the end of the current school year, whatever the outcome of a new check.

What you need to do

To make sure your child receives free school meals from September 2026, please apply (or re-apply) as soon as you can, even if your child already receives them. Applying early means your child's place is ready for the start of the new school year.

You can apply from at **Parent portal | North Northamptonshire Council**. You will usually need your National Insurance number so that your eligibility can be checked, and most applications receive an instant decision.

If you are receiving Universal Credit, we would strongly encourage you to apply, even if you are not sure whether you qualify as there is nothing to lose by checking.

Kind regards

Lesley Middleton
Principal

'Train up a child in the way they should go, and when they are old they will not depart from it.'
Proverbs 22:6

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