

15th July 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

Upcoming Changes to Free School Meals and Universal Credit Eligibility

We are writing to inform you about important national changes to Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility that will come into effect from the start of the 2026/27 school year.

The UK Government has confirmed that, from September 2026, all children in England whose households receive Universal Credit will be entitled to Free School Meals, regardless of their overall household income.

What is Changing?

Under current rules, families must earn below £7,400 per year (after tax and not including benefits) to qualify for Free School Meals. From September 2026, this earnings threshold will no longer apply; any family receiving Universal Credit will be eligible. This change is expected to support over half a million additional pupils across England.

What This Means for Your Family

- No income cap: if your household receives Universal Credit, your child will be eligible.
- Financial savings: families could save up to £495 per child, per year on school lunches.
- Support for wellbeing: access to a nutritious daily meal has been shown to improve children's health, concentration and learning outcomes.

Do Parents Need to Apply?

Yes – although eligibility will cover all families on Universal Credit, parents will still need to apply for Free School Meals so that we can process and confirm your entitlement. Unfortunately, schools cannot automatically enrol pupils for Free School Meals.

We strongly encourage all families receiving Universal Credit to apply, even if you are unsure about whether you qualify.

Some families currently receiving Free School Meals may need to reconfirm their eligibility – we recommend submitting a new application to ensure that your child continues to receive support.

Applications have already opened before the start of the 2026 school year and require your National Insurance number and Universal Credit Reference number.

<http://www.coventry.gov.uk/benefits-1/free-school-meals/2>

If you are unsure whether you are eligible or need help applying, please contact the school office. We are here to support you and ensure that all families who are entitled to this free provision can access it.

Yours faithfully,



Emma O'Connor
Headteacher
Cardinal Newman Catholic School