



Malbank School & Sixth Form College

Rejoice in being the best that we can be.

13th July 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

Important Changes to Free School Meals (FSM) from September 2026

We would like to inform you about important national changes to Free School Meals (FSM) which will take effect from 1 September 2026.

From September 2026, eligibility for FSM will expand so that all children in households receiving Universal Credit will qualify for free school meals.

As part of these changes, there will now be two categories of FSM:

Targeted FSM

For pupils in households receiving a qualifying benefit, including Universal Credit with annual household earnings of £7,400 or less. Pupils in this category will continue to attract additional funding for schools, such as Pupil Premium.

Expanded FSM

For pupils in households receiving Universal Credit with annual household earnings above £7,400. Pupils in this category will receive free school meals only and will not attract additional funding.

You may also hear the term "Ever 6 FSM". This refers to pupils who have been eligible for benefits-based free school meals at any point in the last six years. Schools receive additional funding (Pupil Premium) for these pupils. From September 2026, the Ever 6 FSM measure will apply only to pupils eligible under Targeted FSM. Pupils receiving Expanded FSM will not be included in Ever 6.

In addition, transitional protections introduced in 2018 will end in July 2026. This means that **all current FSM eligibility will be reviewed annually under the new criteria from September 2026.**

What happens next?

Existing FSM recipients currently going to a school in Cheshire East

- No action is required at this stage.
- Eligibility will be automatically reviewed by the local authority.
- Families will be notified, by Cheshire East, of the outcome on a targeted date which is anticipated to be during the first week of August 2026.

 Headteacher: John D. Harrison B.A. (Hons.)

 Welsh Row, Nantwich, Cheshire East, CW5 5HD

 admin@malbank.cheshire.sch.uk

 01270 611009

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New applicants

If you think that you may now be eligible to apply for FSM under the new rules, we recommend you make an application Cheshire East from **1 August 2026**.

Please do not apply before or Cheshire East will not process your application.

New pupils starting at Malbank in September 2026 & currently attending a school out of Cheshire East

Any pupils, in any year group, who will be starting at Malbank School in September 2026, and who are currently receiving Free School Meals at a school outside Cheshire East, **must make a new application regardless of the new eligibility rules.**

Please note that your current local authority will not transfer your child's FSM eligibility status to Cheshire East automatically.

Applications for Free School Meals can be made from 1 August 2026.

Please do not apply before this date, as Cheshire East will not process applications submitted early.

Eligibility for Free School Meals includes:

- Families receiving Universal Credit with household earnings above £7,400 (excluding benefits) who may now qualify under Expanded FSM.

Children may qualify for Targeted FSM (Benefits-Based Free School Meals) if parents or carers receive one or more of the following:

- Universal Credit with annual household earnings of £7,400 or less (excluding benefits)
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- The guarantee element of Pension Credit
- Support available to families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)

Please note that the school is unable to provide updates regarding individual Free School Meal applications. If we are notified that your child has become eligible, we will contact you to confirm this and update our records accordingly.

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Please also note that Free School Meal entitlement cannot be backdated. We therefore strongly encourage all families to activate their ParentPay account and ensure sufficient funds are available for lunches whilst applications are being processed.

Yours sincerely,

John Harrison
Head Teacher – Malbank School

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