

Free school meals

Changes to free school meals: From 1 September 2026, more families will qualify for free school meals. All families receiving Universal Credit will be eligible. We'll check all current claims before this date, and review eligibility each year for schools that Walsall Council looks after.

Children and young people up to age 18 can get a healthy meal at school, free of charge, if:

- they're registered at a state-funded school, and
- they attend school full time, and
- you're eligible

Even if you don't want your child to take the free school meals, you should still apply so that their school receives [extra funding](#).

Eligibility

From September 2026, there will be two types of free school meals:

Targeted free school meals

Targeted free school meals are for lower income families.

Your child may be able to get free school meals if you receive one of the following benefits:

- Universal Credit with household earnings below £7,400 per year
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Pension Credit (guaranteed element)
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- No recourse to public funds (NRPF). Children in NRPF households may be able to get free school meals, subject to income thresholds. You must apply through your child's school, as you cannot apply online. [Find out more about eligible NRPF groups](#).

Expanded free school meals

If you receive Universal Credit and your household earnings are above £7,400 per year, your child will qualify for expanded free school meals. This group covers meals only.

Free school meals for infants

All infant age pupils (Reception, Year 1 and Year 2) in government-funded schools automatically receive a free school meal.

If you're entitled to benefits-related free school meals, you should still apply so that your child's school receives extra funding.

Free school meals for nursery age children

If your child attends a nursery class full time (before and after lunch), they may be able to get free school meals if they qualify.

This does not apply to children attending private nurseries.

Children attending schools outside Walsall

If you live in Walsall but your child attends a school outside the borough, you'll need to apply through the local authority where the school is based, or directly with the school.

Extra funding for your school

Extra funding is available for children who qualify for targeted free school meals.

This funding helps schools provide extra support for pupils.

This is currently:

- £1,550 per year for Reception to Year 6
- £1,100 per year for Year 7 to Year 11

Applying for free school meals for your child, even if they don't take it, means their school gets this funding.