Where Learning Blossoms

Thorney Close Primary School

Torquay Road, Sunderland, SR3 4BB
Telephone:(0191) 5250808
Email:info@thorneycloseprimaryschool.co.uk
www.thorneycloseprimary.org.uk
Headteacher: Mrs C. Jones B.Ed Hons
Chair of Governors: Mrs L. Scott

17th June 2026

Dear Parent/Carer,

Important information regarding Free School Meals

We are writing to inform you that the Government are making national changes to how Free School Meals are provided from September 2026, and this may affect your child's entitlement.

What is changing?

From September 2026, all children whose families receive Universal Credit will be entitled to Free School Meals. The system will now have two categories depending on household income.

Targeted Free School Meals: For families receiving Universal Credit with yearly household earnings of £7,400 or less. Children in this group will continue to receive additional support such as extended school travel assistance (where applicable).

Expanded Free School Meals: For families receiving Universal Credit with earnings above £7,400. Children in this group will still receive a Free School Meal each day. If your child currently accesses extended school travel assistance this will continue for the academic year 2026/27.

Who is eligible?

We expect many more children to be eligible for Free School Meals from September. From that time, Free School Meals will be available to pupils in receipt of - or whose parents or carers are in receipt of - one or more of the following benefits:

- Universal Credit
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

A pupil is only eligible to receive a Free School Meal where both:

- a claim for this support has been made
- their eligibility has been verified by the school where they are enrolled or by the local authority

Households may also be entitled to a meal if they:

- are in receipt of income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- receive the Guarantee element of Pension Credit
- meet criteria set out in separate guidance for families with no recourse to public funds

Changes to existing entitlement

Since April 2018, transitional protection has meant that children kept their Free School Meals even if family circumstances changed. This protection will finish at the end of the 2025/26 school year (this July).

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What this means for your child

If your child currently receives a Free School Meal they will be reassessed before September 2026. Your child will then fall into one of the following groups:

- Continue to receive Free School Meals and additional support (known as Targeted FSM)
- Continue to receive Free School Meals only (known as Expanded FSM)
- No longer be eligible for Free School Meals

If your child is no longer eligible, you will need to pay for school meals or provide a packed lunch from September 2026. We know many people may be concerned about this unexpected new cost.

You can find information, advice and support by visiting the 'Managing your money' pages on the Sunderland City Council website https://www.sunderland.gov.uk/managingyourmoney

New applications and re-applications

Sunderland has an online Free School Meals Portal that allows families to apply for Free School Meals quickly and easily. The portal is currently being updated in line with new emerging Government guidelines and is not fully operational, so we are unable to accept applications at this time. We expect the portal to be available from the first week of July 2026.

We will update our website and inform your school when it is live.

If you believe your child will become eligible from September 2026, you will be able to apply online using Sunderland's Free School Meals Portal before September.

Likewise, if your child currently receives Free School Meals and you disagree with their expected eligibility status from September 2026, you will be able to reapply online using Sunderland's Free School Meals Portal before September.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs C. Jones
Headteacher