

Important Update About Free School Meals (FSM) and HAF Eligibility

We wanted to share an important update about changes to Free School Meals (FSM) that will begin from September 2026, and what this means for the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme.

From September 2026, there will be two different types of Free School Meals eligibility:

- **Targeted FSM** – this is the current eligibility criteria used for HAF programmes.
- **Expanded FSM** – this is a new, wider category that will allow more children and young people to receive free school meals in school.

What does this mean for HAF?

Although more children may become eligible for free school meals through the new Expanded FSM category, the government has confirmed that HAF eligibility will continue to be linked to **Targeted FSM only**.

This means:

- Some children may receive free school meals at school but may not automatically qualify for HAF-funded holiday activities.
- Children who meet the Targeted FSM criteria will continue to be eligible for HAF.

Why is there a difference?

The HAF programme is designed to support children and young people experiencing the highest levels of financial disadvantage. The government has therefore decided to keep HAF linked to the existing Targeted FSM criteria.

Could this effect families already accessing HAF?

Potentially, yes. Some families who previously qualified for HAF through temporary protections under the old FSM system may no longer automatically qualify from September 2026 if their circumstances have changed. We understand this may be worrying or disappointing for some families and we are committed to supporting families as much as possible during this transition.

What happens next?

Schools and local authorities will begin using a new system from June 2026 to check whether children qualify under Targeted FSM or Expanded FSM. We will continue to provide updates and clear guidance as more information becomes available. We will also continue to explore how local discretionary support may help families who may be affected by these changes.

If you have any questions, please contact your school or local HAF team.