

Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill - Summary

The Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill was introduced in the Assembly on the 3rd March 2026.

The Bill aims to address the issue of holiday hunger by seeking to secure provision of permanent financial support through direct payments, in lieu of free school meals (FSMs), during school holiday periods for those who are entitled.

Such a scheme would ensure that children who are entitled to free school meals will receive support to alleviate food poverty during school holiday periods

The Bill is an amending Bill. It amends the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

The Bill contains four clauses that relate to modification of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986; consequential amendments to the Order relating to the retention and disposal of records and to the definition of “relevant periods”; interpretation; and the short title and commencement.

There is a significant body of research that links access to affordable, nutritious food to improved school performance and better mental health outcomes for children and young people.

The Education (Holiday Meal Payments) Bill is a necessary mitigation to ensure that children do not go hungry during school holiday periods and to provide much needed support to low-income families.

While it is only one small piece of the puzzle in ending child poverty, it will play a vital role in helping disadvantaged children throughout our communities.