

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP

Secretary of State for Education

The Rt Hon Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

Monday 2 November 2020

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Further to our letter dated 16 October 2020, we write to you once more regarding the ongoing provision of healthy food to vulnerable children from households experiencing low and unpredictable incomes, including those whose situation has worsened as a result of the ongoing Covid-19 emergency.

On Wednesday 21 October, the motion *to continue directly funding provision of free school meals over the school holidays until Easter 2021 to prevent over a million children going hungry during this crisis* was defeated. Even when the national voucher scheme was in place this summer, 18% of 8-17 year olds (1.4 million children) reported experiences of food insecurity during the school holidays, and 11% (850,000 children) reported that either they or their family had visited a food bank<sup>[1]</sup>. Despite clear evidence of need, families received no support from government during the autumn half term.

The decision by government not to respond to genuine need resulted in an overwhelming show of support from local authorities, community groups, restaurants, schools and parents who stepped in to fill the gap left, to ensure that no children went hungry during half term. Indeed, as we write, over one million people have signed a parliament petition to permanently address child food poverty.

We support the National Food Strategy's recommendation for funding to be extended to support vulnerable children during school holidays, which we hope will be reflected in the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review. But right now, families are facing the grim reality of a two-week Christmas break without access to free school meals and the indignity of having to rely on food banks or face a postcode lottery, dependant on whether community initiatives are available to help feed their children. We salute the community response over autumn half term but there is a better way to support families; a coordinated approach centred around child welfare.

We recommend that a top-up grant be distributed via local authorities (or directly to schools and academy trusts) to cover the Christmas holiday period and beyond to Easter 2021, if England is to follow the lead of the devolved nations. This grant would be allocated according to free school meal registration and the funds could then be converted into food hampers, supermarket vouchers or cash support payments for families.

**Will this Government commit to funding benefits-related free school meals during the Christmas holiday period and through to Easter 2021, including children from households with no recourse to public funds?**

We urge you to commit now in order to provide local authorities and schools with time to plan their provision in consultation with their existing caterers, local partners and eligible families. We cannot rely on civil society to fill the hunger gap as too many children will miss out on the nutrition they need to thrive.

Please reply to this urgent request as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Stephanie Slater, Founder/CEO, School Food Matters and co-Chair School Food Plan Alliance

Barbara Crowther, Coordinator, Children's Food Campaign

Anna Taylor OBE, Executive Director, Food Foundation

Naomi Duncan, Chief Executive, Chefs in Schools

James Toop, CEO, BiteBack2030

Rob Percival, Head of Policy, Soil Association's Food for Life

Lindsay Boswell, CEO, FareShare

Dr Maria Bryant, Reader in Public Health Nutrition, Department of Health Sciences and the Hull York Medical School and ASO Chair of the Board of Trustees

Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard, Deputy Mayor for Social Integration, Social Mobility and Community Engagement, Greater London Authority

Alex Cunningham, CEO, Magic Breakfast

Kath Dalmeny, CEO of Sustain

Mark Game, CEO, The Bread and Butter Thing

Andy Burman, Chief Executive, The British Dietetic Association

Melissa Green, General Secretary of The Women's Institute (The WI)

Cllr Judith Blake, LGA Labour Group, and Chair of LGA Children and Young People's board

Clara Widdison, Head of Social Inclusion, Mayor's Fund for London

Matthew Philpott, Executive Director, Food Active

Paul Wright, Founding Member, Children's First Alliance

Eddie Crouch, Chair, British Dental Association

Sarah Hickey, Director of the Childhood Obesity Programme, Guy's and St Thomas' Charity

Graham MacGregor, Chair of Action on Sugar and Action on Salt

Peter McGrath, Operational Director, Meals and More

Mary McGrath, CEO, FoodCycle

Dr Helen Crawley, Director, First Steps Nutrition Trust

Alison Stiby Harris, Head of Public Affairs, Save the Children

Lucy Nethsingha, Lib Dem spokesperson for CYP Board, LGA

Sabine Goodwin, Coordinator, Independent Food Aid Network

Jon Richards, Head of Education, UNISON

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[1] Food Foundation data calculated from a Childwise survey. Total sample size was 1064 children aged 7-17 years old in the United Kingdom. Fieldwork conducted between 8-20 September. The survey was conducted online and is nationally representative [https://foodfoundation.org.uk/vulnerable\\_groups/the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-food](https://foodfoundation.org.uk/vulnerable_groups/the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-food)