

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP  
Secretary of State for Education

The Rt Hon Vicky Ford MP  
Minister of State for Schools

Wednesday 5 May 2020

We write to you as a matter of urgency regarding your department's on-going response to the Covid-19 emergency and to highlight the importance of ensuring continuity of school food services for all children in households currently affected by food insecurity and low or unpredictable income.

On Monday 4 May, new research from the Food Foundation indicated that an estimated 5.1 million households with children had already experienced some form of hunger or food insecurity during the first four weeks of lockdown. This includes many families who ought to be accessing a substitute free school meal offer via continuing school meal provision, the national free school meal voucher scheme or alternative food delivery, or indeed, alternative voucher or cash measures put in place by their schools, academy trusts or local authorities. Furthermore, despite being eligible for free school meals, one third of families said they still have not received any substitute food offer whatsoever.

On 22 April, the Welsh Government confirmed additional funding of £33 million to provide £19.50 per week for every child entitled to free school meals to cover school holidays until 31 August. This provides schools and local authorities with both time and financial assurance to put in place their plans for holiday provision, contract with their partners, and most importantly the logistics to help them reach all those most in need.

We welcomed the Government's extension of funding to enable the school meal voucher scheme to cover the Easter holidays. We acknowledge that the Department for Education has also already recognised the need for summer holiday provision, with £9 million funding for the third year of pilot holiday programmes to run during the summer holidays in selected areas, and that the successful bidders for 2020 were informed in March. In 2019 this pilot programme helped provide activities and healthy food for around 50,000 children. However, beyond the 1.3 million children in England estimated to be entitled to free school meals before the start of the Covid-19 outbreak, the latest insights from the Food Foundation would indicate that around 2 million children in the UK have now directly experienced food insecurity or hunger since 23 March. This situation now requires a national level funding commitment beyond pilot areas to cover the holiday periods.

We, the undersigned organisations, call on the Department for Education to immediately confirm that additional funding will be made available to local authorities and school academy trusts (and their respective food partners), at a level sufficient to expand provision of free school meals substitutes, and to the National School Breakfast Programme, to cover all holiday periods across the whole of England until end of August. This must apply to all school-age children eligible for benefits-related free school meals, plus all those families currently applying for Universal Credit or other income support programmes, and all children with no recourse to public funds.

We would welcome an opportunity to share our ideas about how this might be achieved, and look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Barbara Crowther, Co-ordinator, Children's Food Campaign  
Stephanie Wood, Founder/CEO, School Food Matters and Co-Chair School Food Plan Alliance

Anna Taylor OBE, Executive Director, The Food Foundation

Jeanette Orrey MBE, Co-Founder Food for Life & Co-Chair School Food Plan Alliance

Rob Percival, Head of Policy, Food for Life/Soil Association.

Naomi Duncan, Chief Executive, Chefs in Schools

James Bielby, Chief Executive, Federation of Wholesale Distributors

Kath Dalmeny, Chief Executive, Sustain

Matthew Philpott, Executive Director, Health Equalities Group

Leigh Powell, National Officer, Education & Children's Services, UNISON

Kath Roberts, Board of Trustees, Association for the Study of Obesity

Katharine Jenner, Campaign Director, Action on Sugar & Action on Salt

James Toop, CEO, Biteback 2030

Dr Helen Crawley, Director, First Steps Nutrition Trust

Duncan Stephenson, Deputy CEO, RSPH

Andrew Forsey, National Director, Feeding Britain

Alysa Remtulla, Head of Policy & Campaigns, Magic Breakfast

Dr. Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney, Joint General Secretaries of the National Education Union

Kirsty McHugh, Chief Executive, Mayor's Fund for London

Sara Jayne Stanes, Chief Executive, Royal Academy of Culinary Arts' Adopt a School Trust

Peter McGrath, Operations Director, Meals and More

Daf Viney, Director of Services, Hackney Migrant Centre

Nicola Dolton, Deputy Director Services & Innovation, Family Action