

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

The Rt Hon Vicky Ford MP
Minister of State for Schools

Friday 15 May 2020

We are writing to you following our letter of Wednesday 6 May to highlight the importance of Government ensuring continuity of school food services for all children in households currently affected by food insecurity and by low or unpredictable income.

Hunger does not recognise term time dates. Since sending our letter, over [40 national and local organisations have joined our call](#) to ensure that funding is available to schools in England to provide catered school meals, food parcels, vouchers or cash-based support for the rest of this academic year.

We are therefore extremely dismayed to read the written responses made this week to questions from [Lloyd Russell Moyle MP](#) and [Dan Jarvis MP](#), indicating that there is no plan to maintain support for schools over half term. In light of recent commitments to extend the Government's Job Retention Scheme until October 2020, we do not understand why government would ignore the plight of children living in food insecure households and leave them at risk of hunger during the school holidays.

We urge the Department to respond to the growing concern of young people who are becoming increasingly vocal on this matter. In the last 24 hours [a petition has been launched on Change.Org by Christina Adane](#). Christina lives in Lambeth, is a recipient of free school meals, and is a Youth Board member with Bite Back 2030. In just a few hours, her petition has already gathered almost 9,000 signatures.

We call on the Department for Education to immediately announce a funding commitment to cover all school holidays for the rest of the 2019/20 academic year at a level sufficient to enable schools to ensure every child in need of free school meals can access the support they need.

Headteachers have shared their frustrations about the national voucher scheme, and their anxiety about claiming reimbursement for any catered offer or alternative cash or voucher solutions. This leads us to recommend that the Department for Education should establish a simple, centrally funded mechanism for ongoing provision of meals to pupils who cannot attend school.

We urge you to commit guaranteed funding per pupil entitled to free school meals at a level of £19.50 per week to match the offer to families in Wales. This funding should be paid directly to schools so that they can use the funding flexibly to identify the best local solution

for each pupil. This could be vouchers for a local supermarket, a cash-based transfer or a holiday food and fun programme.

Schools should be able to draw down this funding through a simple monthly claim form, backed up by evidence available through the school census and attendance records. Schools should feel confident that they can claim for children in households who have applied for Universal Credit during this crisis, as well as children with no recourse to public funds.

If the Department matches the Welsh Government's commitment to cover May half term and the six-week summer holiday, this would be an investment of £177.5 million based on 1.3 million children in England being eligible at the start of the crisis. Given the higher number of children now likely to be experiencing food insecurity as a result of the crisis, we estimate an investment of around £200m is required to cover every eligible child in England.

We are mindful of the challenge of developing a programme to feed children during school closures that is fair to all, and we appreciate the enormous efforts of the Department to ensure that no child goes hungry. We now urge you to take the next step, acknowledge the needs of food insecure families and afford children the care and attention they deserve.

Yours sincerely

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Children's Food Campaign

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School Food Matters

Anna Taylor
Food Foundation

James Toop
Bite Back 2030

Rob Percival
Soil Association's Food For Life

Naomi Duncan
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