Parent view
Mother in Lambeth

On the voucher scheme:
Parent phoned the SFM office very confused about the voucher scheme. As her child was in receipt of a UIFSM, she felt she should be receiving vouchers. She had phoned the school several times, but was unable to get an answer and couldn’t find a relevant number on the council website. SFM explained that the voucher scheme was for benefits-related FSM and referred her to the Government guidance, but she had not understood that this was the case from the literature she had received from her school.

Schools
Primary school in LB Richmond
Caterer has provided packed lunches for approximately 15 key-worker children per day who are still in school. Over the Easter break the school will continue to care for between 4 and 15 children in school. The school is providing a teatime meal so that children don’t have to have two packed lunches.

In terms of provision for FSM children, the school has been working with its caterer. In week one, they provided packed lunches to be distributed to the 62 children registered for FSM at the school gate at a given time. Only 18 lunches were collected. Many parents couldn’t come because they were self isolating. As a result, in week two the school moved to a weekly box scheme. Twenty-three boxes were collected, but the school and parents found the boxes unsatisfactory with contents including loose apples, carrots, an onion, a tin of tomatoes, and a handful of pasta in a paper bag. A recipe book was provided inside each box, but the recipes did not relate to the contents of the box. Fortunately, other charities have supported the school and boxes from the caterer have been supplemented with other goods from elsewhere.

From Friday (3 April) the school was promised a delivery of boxes more suited to its families. However, the school has taken the decision to move to the Edenred voucher scheme. This transition has not been straightforward. The email from Edenred went into the local authority’s email-system spam filter. The LA has had to release the emails from the spam filter centrally. The school has been told that in order to activate the scheme, it must upload a list of its FSM children. The vouchers will go direct to parents, appearing on their phones.
**Primary school in LB Camden**
School’s caterer is providing a hot lunch for key worker/vulnerable children and the staff who are working each day and hampers every fortnight for FSM children containing:

- Tin of baked beans
- Packet of biscuits
- Tin of fruit
- Family pack of cornflakes
- Packet of pasta
- Tin of soup
- Long-life milk
- Packet of cheese
- Loaf of bread

**Primary school in LB Southwark**
Caterer is still providing hot meals for key-worker children and staff in school and will continue to do so throughout the Easter holidays. The caterer is not making up packed lunches or providing food for the FSM children, but the school is operating a voucher scheme via Wonde. For the two weeks up until Easter, parents have received £23 worth of vouchers - £11.50 per week, or £2.30 per day. Post Easter this will rise to £30 per fortnight in the form of an e-card as per the Government scheme.

**Secondary school in LB Kensington and Chelsea**
Very few key-worker children are in school, but the school canteen remains open to serve a hot meal to staff and pupils present.

**Primary school in LB Kensington and Chelsea**
FSM families are receiving £20 per child, per week in vouchers in the weeks preceding the Easter holiday.

**Local Authorities**

**LB Lambeth**
In Lambeth, many schools have had to close fully owing to the small number of key-worker children in attendance. There are now just a few hubs operating for those that need them and this has meant the provision of hot food for vulnerable children has become difficult. Because of the need for social distancing, schools feel unable to encourage children to come to school to enjoy a hot meal. Lambeth schools have handed out more than 500 supermarket vouchers over the last few days, with families preferring this option to either hampers or prepared meals.

The council has considered delivering individual meals to targeted families, but this would incur additional costs as well as presenting other challenges. Many families prefer to have a choice in terms of what meal is provided for their child and unfortunately some of the box schemes that have been offered by some caterers have not been delivering the basic food provisions that families feel they need. Lambeth caterers will continue to deliver hot meals for children attending hubs but some catering staff have been asked to stand down, with the possibility of more being furloughed in the near future.
Lambeth is expecting very few children to be in school over the Easter holiday. The main hub in North Lambeth will be looking after children from eight schools. It is anticipated that this hub will cater for approximately 20 pupils over Easter, increasing to 40 pupils after the holiday.

Most Lambeth schools are trying to keep in touch with every family with a phone call at least once a week during term time (more regularly for vulnerable children). Over the next few weeks this will help identify which families would benefit from additional support as a result of lost employment and wages or the additional challenges of children being at home.

Lambeth council is encouraging suppliers and partners to move towards consolidating local emergency food services in neighbourhoods, targeting the self-isolating, elderly and sick as well as FSM children. One head is working with a local councillor and LEAP to help establish a food bank on the Tulse Hill estate. The food bank will provide food for anyone who needs it rather than specifically FSM families. It is hoped that this will help tackle the hidden poverty of families in Lambeth who don’t appear on FSM statistics, as they aren’t in receipt of benefits, such as the self-employed or those in low-paid jobs who have had their hours cut.

**Breakfasts in Lambeth**
Some Breakfast provision is still operating on school sites, although catering staff are serving very low numbers. Providers are Magic Breakfast, Greggs and Tenison’s.

**LB of Richmond and Kingston**
AFC (children’s services across both boroughs is advising schools to choose either:

- a weekly food package from the caterer
- vouchers through the government programme with EdenRed
- a combination of the two

The first parcels delivered to Richmond and Kingston schools from the caterer were very unsatisfactory so many schools immediately dropped out and went to vouchers. The food cost of parcels was between £4 and £5 per week.

**Caterers**

**A small caterer supporting schools to provide an in-house service**
Caters for ten schools across Southwark, Hackney, and Hounslow; one special school, two PRUs, and the remaining seven are primary schools. Hot meals are being provided for children of key workers, but only three of the ten schools have remained open. Numbers vary between four and 17 children. FSM children at all ten schools are receiving weekly food parcels. One primary school had to close due to problems with its cleaner, but will reopen after the Easter holidays. At present, schools are only using their school cooks to support FSM children and haven’t offered vouchers. All schools are closing for Easter and plan to reopen after Easter.
**Contract caterers**

There is great anxiety about whether to furlough staff or retain them based on PPN 220. One caterer has already had to pull in the Cabinet Office to instruct an authority to honour the notice, following the LA’s refusal. This is partly as the PPN is guidance, not law so leaves caterers vulnerable.

Many schools are closing and so will not require a catering service. Where schools are operating a service, numbers are low, therefore there are financial implications for schools i.e. the meal price will need to rise to cover costs. There are fears that schools will reject the price increase and caterers will be out of pocket, or that schools will revert to the voucher scheme.

One small caterer described a hybrid offer. Where schools are closed catering staff have been furloughed assuming the caterers will be able to access the scheme and school uses the national voucher scheme for FSM children.

Where schools are open, caterers look at the service required (ie meal numbers) and reduced staff accordingly (through furlough scheme). The caterer then provides a quote to the school for meals based on:

- cost of unit chef - static
- charge for cost of food - variable depending on meal numbers (food only, not labour)
- charge for contribution to caterer’s overhead = admin, supply chain, finance - static

Charge for overhead is calculated by dividing total overhead by the number of schools operating. Schools are doing the calculations and working out the cost and already ten schools out of 50 have declined the offer owing to high meal prices.

**Caterer in Torbay**

A caterer in Torbay expressed concern about the impact of the vouchers on the catering service. The company set up a food parcel model for all schools based on good quality ingredients and 600 were issued to schools for distribution to families in need. The thinking behind the boxes was that they would support local businesses, pupils would be provided with food, and handing over the boxes would provide a point of communication for vulnerable families. Furthermore, the boxes would help reduce the need for these families to visit the supermarkets. Assembly of the boxes kept catering teams busy and the reaction from families was positive.

The introduction of the vouchers however has meant that schools are choosing vouchers over box schemes. Schools are seeing that they will benefit financially as they will keep the money issued for FSM children and UIFSM, while the Government issues the vouchers without drawing on individual school funds. If schools choose the box scheme, the cost will be taken from their FSM allowance, thus making it a less attractive option. The caterer is appealing for caterers to be reimbursed for the food parcels to make the options equally appealing.

**Stephanie Wood**

Friday 3 April 2020