



2020-0033338VFPO

Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Stephanie Wood

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

By email: stephanie@schoolfoodmatters.org

20 July 2020

Dear Stephanie,

Thank you for your letters of 22 June and 25 June, addressed to both myself and the Secretary of State, about the guidance on the COVID Summer Food Fund. I would be grateful if you could share my reply with your co-signatories.

May I begin by wishing you well in these challenging and troubling times.

Through the COVID Summer Food Fund, schools can support eligible pupils with a £90 voucher to cover the six-week holiday period. Schools must order the vouchers at least one week before their school term ends.

You asked about families who become eligible for free school meals during the school holidays and whether they can apply for support. Schools should continue to accept and verify free school meal applications up until the end of the summer term. If a school receives a claim for an eligible child during the final week before the school's summer holidays, it will be possible for the school to place an exceptional order for that child via our supplier, Edenred. Pupils that become eligible for free school meals during the summer holidays will not be eligible for the voucher scheme and the process to enable schools to rectify orders already placed will not enable schools to add them, this is because school offices will be closed during the summer holidays.

If families are facing hardship, they can access the Local Authority Emergency Assistance Grant. On 10 June, the Prime Minister confirmed an additional £63 million to be distributed to local authorities in England to help those who are struggling to afford food and other essentials due to COVID-19. In England, any family with a child that is experiencing severe financial difficulty and struggling to afford food may approach their council and apply to receive support from this new money, as may anyone.

In addition, the government has introduced an uplift to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit by around £1000 a year for the next 12 months as part of an injection of over £6.5 billion by government into the welfare system.

Additional support has also been pledged by various departments across government, with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) announcing the provision of £16 million for food support through charities including FareShare and WRAP. DEFRA have also issued 2 million food packages to those who are shielding and have launched a £7 billion package of welfare support which will benefit over 4 million of the most vulnerable households.

In addition, this summer, the department will again run the Holiday Activities and Food programme at a cost of £9 million, through which thousands of disadvantaged pupils will benefit from support.

Regarding alternative support available, we are providing extra funding to schools, on top of existing budgets, to cover unavoidable costs incurred due to the coronavirus outbreak that cannot be met from their existing resources. This includes local arrangements set up by schools to support children not attending school who are eligible for free school meals, where our national voucher scheme is not appropriate. If the COVID Summer Food Fund is not appropriate, schools can make an alternative arrangement, such as using another voucher scheme or providing food parcels. Schools will be able to claim for these costs through the exceptional costs fund in the autumn. We do not advise schools to make cash payments to families.

You also asked about families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and we have now updated our guidance to reflect the £31,500 threshold (for London) and the £28,200 threshold for areas outside of London.

Thank you for writing about this important matter. I hope this reply assures you of our commitment to ensuring that no child should go hungry as a result of the measures that we have introduced to protect the NHS and save lives.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vicky Ford". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Vicky Ford MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families