

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

The Rt Hon Vicky Ford MP  
Minister of State for Schools

Thursday 7 January 2020

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We write seeking clarification on provision of free school meals during school closures.

On Monday 4 January, in his address to the nation, Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated: *“We will provide extra support to ensure that pupils entitled to free school meals will continue to receive them while schools are closed.”* This was followed yesterday by your announcement in the House stating that extra funding would be available to support schools to provide food parcels or hot meals, and a national voucher scheme where a local solution is not possible.

The current guidance on providing school meals during the Covid-19 outbreak extends eligibility for free school meals to children from families with no recourse to public funds. This extension has been widely welcomed by schools and poverty campaigners who see this as a lifeline for extremely vulnerable families during the Covid crisis. Thank you for your continued support.

We understand that things are moving apace but would be grateful if you could confirm when the guidance on provision of school meals will be updated, and when schools will be able to access the national voucher scheme if they are unable to access support through their caterers.

On school catering, could you also advise whether PPN 02/20 and PPN 04/20, which encouraged schools to work with their catering suppliers to ensure their ongoing financial and operational stability, will be updated? These two notices expired in the autumn term and there is now considerable concern for school meal providers, and unwelcome uncertainty for Headteachers, over what measures should be taken. We are sure you will agree that it's important to ensure that catering providers remain financially solvent and able to deliver services when schools return.

As we are receiving many enquiries from local authorities, schools and parents, we'd appreciate a prompt reply.

Yours sincerely

Stephanie Slater, Founder/Chief Executive, 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  
Rob Percival, Head of Policy, Soil Association's Food for Life  
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