

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

The Rt Hon Vicky Ford MP  
Minister of State for Schools

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Secretary of State for Health

1st July 2020

We write to seek urgently clarity on the status of the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme, which has been suspended since March 2020.

We understand that a decision was taken that the scheme would not operate during the period that schools and nurseries were closed. That period has now concluded. Children aged 4-6 (in Reception and Y1), who would be in receipt of the scheme, have been back in school since 1st June, and yet the scheme remains suspended.

We ask that you confirm –

### **1. When the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme will be reinstated**

The suspension of the scheme throughout the month of June has meant that children have missed out on roughly 50 million portions of fruit and vegetables.<sup>1</sup> The scheme's continued suspension until the end of the summer term will see this rise to 80 million.

We know that children aren't eating enough fruit and veg. Approximately 90 percent of children under the age of 10 are missing out on their five-a-day, and one in four eats less than one portion per day. There is a social gradient in these figures; children in the least affluent households are three times as likely to be eating less than one portion of fruit or veg per day.<sup>2</sup>

A recent study from Northumbria University found that around half of the children eligible for free school meal vouchers have experienced "a significant drop in their intake of fruit and vegetables since schools closed in March."<sup>3</sup> The suspension of the School Fruit and Veg Scheme threatens to compound this decline. The scheme should be reinstated as a matter of urgency.

### **2. That schools and caterers providing fruit to eligible children in the absence of the scheme will be reimbursed**

Some schools have been finding alternative means of providing a portion of fruit and veg to eligible children, but most have not. A survey conducted by the Soil Association at the end of June 2020 found that one in three responding schools had put alternative arrangements in place, such as:

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<sup>1</sup> 2.3 million children are eligible for the scheme and would be in receipt of a portion of fruit or veg each school day.

<sup>2</sup> <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Pease-Please-Veg-Facts-2020-In-Brief-spreads.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://newsroom.northumbria.ac.uk/pressreleases/massive-decrease-in-fruit-and-vegetable-intake-reported-by-children-receiving-free-school-meals-following-lockdown-3005719>

- asking parents for donations;
- paying for fruit and vegetables from the school budget;
- asking the school caterer to front the costs;
- asking teachers to bring in fruit from home;
- relying on community groups to provide fruit;
- and asking local councillors for money to buy fruit.

We are concerned that teachers and parents, and schools and caterers, are plugging the gap created by the ongoing suspension of the scheme, and we ask that the Government commits to reimbursing those schools who have made alternative arrangements. We also ask that the Government confirm how the funding for the scheme has been reallocated since March 2020, including where the funding has been reallocated to. We recommend that any savings should be ringfenced and re-invested in the scheme upon its reinstatement.

### **3. That scheme is extended to all primary school children when the contract is renewed in 2022**

Given the paucity of fruit and vegetables in children's diets, and the Government's commitment, as stated the second chapter of the Childhood Obesity Plan, to halve rates of child obesity by 2030, we ask that the Government commits to extending the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme to all primary school children when the contract is renewed in 2022.

### **4. That more local and British produce is sourced through the scheme**

Finally, the scheme should be reviewed to optimise the value it delivers in addition to child health. We understand that £60 million is spent on the scheme, yet a Freedom of Information request submitted by the Soil Association in 2019 found that only 30-40 percent of the produce provided through the scheme is British, including only 13 percent of apples and 5 percent of pears.

As a flagship Government procurement scheme, the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme should be supporting British farmers and traders to recover from the impacts of Covid-19, including by providing more local and British produce.

We would be happy to meet with you to share further feedback from schools on the value of the scheme and how it could be improved, and to discuss the pragmatics of increasing the supply of British and local produce through the scheme.

As millions of children are missing out on their daily piece of fruit and veg, we would appreciate a prompt reply.

Yours sincerely

Rob Percival, Head of Policy, Soil Association's Food for Life  
Stephanie Wood, Founder/CEO, School Food Matters and co-Chair School Food Plan Alliance  
Sofia Parente, Campaigns and Policy Coordinator, Sustain  
Anna Taylor OBE, Executive Director, Food Foundation  
Naomi Duncan, Chief Executive, Chefs in Schools  
James Toop, CEO, BiteBack 2030