News from Schools and local authorities
Covid-19 school closures – Week Nine

Parent View
SFM has noticed a drop in calls from parents which suggests that the voucher scheme is now more widely understood and effectively used by parents. However, SFM is currently following up on one email received 22 May:
‘I am **** Me and my brother school meals expired can I have a new one because I didn’t get to use it and now I now how to use it and I am from **** school and I did not use any of them and please we don’t have some food.’
SFM is in contact with appropriate council children’s services as the school phone number says ‘mailbox full’.

The majority of requests for help received by SFM are from families with English as an additional language.

Schools
Primary School in LB Southwark
School has approximately 17 children attending each day and has 33 FSM children on the role. School has found that its lowest income families are being quite resilient, but that an increasing number of families are coming under strain as their financial circumstances become more difficult. Unlike the lowest income families, they don’t all have access to benefits etc, so the situation is more challenging. The school is organising food packages and accessing local support funds. Parents are bringing their children back into school because there is simply no food at home. School funds are very stretched. School has signed-up to GSTC/SFM breakfast programme in order to ensure parents can offer children a healthy a breakfast each day.

Primary School in LB Tower Hamlets
School located in a very deprived area. Many families live below the poverty line, even those who do not qualify for FSM. When schools first closed, the school had approximately 35 children attending, drawn from 10 different schools. Now they have the same number of children, but from only four schools as there is increased need. When schools first closed, and the voucher scheme was initiated, the head thought that the cost of the vouchers would come from school budget. He therefore decided that the school could offer a better solution, providing food boxes for its vulnerable families. Head found wholesalers who could supply the contents of the boxes, but once he had deducted the kitchen costs from the £15 total per child, he found that he was only left with approximately £7-£8 per child, which was not adequate. Head initiated a fund-raising programme which has been very successful and the school now acts as a hub, supplying 900 food parcels to over 20 schools. FareShare and the Felix Project have been helping with the scheme, also with the supply of hot meals to other schools in the area. Basic box content is as follows:
• Loaf of bread
• Five fruit yoghurts
• Long-life milk
• Pasta or rice
• Five pieces of fruit
• Tinned tuna, sweetcorn and tomatoes
• Cereal bars
• Box of cereal
• Cucumber
• Cheese portions

The box is supplemented with additional items each week depending on availability. Families find collecting the boxes is a good point of social contact, but for those who are self-isolating, the school is using Good Gym and Bike Works to deliver parcels. School signed up to the voucher scheme too after three to four weeks. The voucher scheme has been difficult to manage as many parents have not supplied the correct email addresses etc. The school administration team have been dealing with this, phoning all families once a week and vulnerable families three times a week, talking them through the scheme and how it works. Any vouchers not redeemed have been followed up and the school is encouraging parents to sign up by using the food parcel as motivation – parcels will stop unless they sign up to the system. This has worked and they now have 70% redemption of vouchers.

On site, head found that catering for key worker and vulnerable children was challenging as the catering team collapsed due to the need to isolate etc. He therefore made links with The Dorchester kitchen and Ottelenghi. Both kitchens have sent chefs to help in the school and children are growing produce in the school garden for the chefs to use. School is now supplying approximately 600 meals each day to children in schools around the area.

Caterers
Catering Manager of Academy in LB Southwark
Academy is made up of four schools: one secondary with 1300 students; one six-form centre with 350 students and two primaries, one with 270 students and a second with 570 students. Caterer works directly with the schools and is not a contract caterer. Caterer says that the current crisis has been a disaster for many of his contacts in other schools. Many staff working for other catering companies have been furloughed or made redundant as soon as schools were shut. He has been approached by other London schools for advice on how to manage school catering over the period. At present caterer is serving hot meals for key-worker children in school. The secondary school forms the base for the operation and then the hot food is being transported by van to the other schools. Across the whole academy, caterer estimates that he is serving approximately 50 hot meals each day. The academy has used the voucher scheme, but the PTA is supplementing the vouchers with food parcels to vulnerable families. These include families where some of the children in the family are not yet old enough to qualify for FSM and so parents are struggling to pay for enough food. He is also in touch with several families of autistic children.
who are very specific about what they will eat. Caterer is shopping for their specific needs himself and keeping these foods in the school freezer for families to come and collect as and when they need.

Looking forward, the caterer’s concerns focus around keeping both staff and students safe. His staff will be asked to volunteer to work so that those who are shielding or are high-risk can stay at home. To date roughly 90% of the workforce have volunteered to return. In terms of the food that will be on offer, caterer has assessed the dining rooms and realized that there is not capacity for students to eat under the social distancing guidelines e.g. the primary school dining room could only accommodate 32 children under the new guidelines. Caterer has therefore decided to offer packed lunches. These will be transported to the primary schools from the secondary school kitchen and the children will eat them in their classrooms. For the secondary students, the caterer is offering pre-packaged baguettes and hot pasta pots with disposable cutlery. The students select their food and pay for it using an app on their phone. This has raised some issues in terms of distancing. The caterer is organising a one-way system through the canteen with 2m gaps and will have all doors open so that no student needs to touch them. The pay areas will also have hand gel and equipment will be wiped down between students. In the kitchen, the caterer is putting staff on a rota system so that only two to three staff will be going in each day. The idea is that there is a skeleton team of staff and all will be working. Caterer has closed some of the academy kitchens in order to prevent staff being called in who are not essential. Caterer is also running a hygiene refresher course for staff and is working closely with the schools to ensure that the system runs as efficiently as possible.

**Community Groups**

**Community Organiser, PACT**

Originally contacted SFM three weeks ago (week 6) looking for advice on how to help families access food vouchers when they are not easily able to get online. Specifically, families that may not have access to the Internet, do not own suitable devices, or struggle to use the Internet due to learning difficulties, language issues or disabilities. Organisation has updated SFM this week on how two families are managing:

**Family 1:**
Community worker has spent much time with the mother of the family insisting that she chase up her vouchers with school and helping her understand letters that have been sent to her. Mother doesn’t like to ask for anything and doesn’t understand what she is entitled to, so it has been difficult to persuade her that she should follow-up with the vouchers. Eventually, this week, she has received an email with a code to redeem a £50 voucher. Community worker had to spend a lot of time with her on the phone to download the voucher and explain how it worked – there was no way she could have managed it alone. Some confusion as to why she has only been given £50 as she has not received any money so far for her children’s free school meals. Community worker has encouraged her to call her school again to check what has happened to her £15 per week, per child, for the last two months.
**Family 2:**
Mother has two children who both receive free school meals. She received a message several weeks ago that she would be posted vouchers and never received anything (she has difficulty online). Community worker spoke to her last week to insist that she ask her school for her vouchers as she also didn't feel in a position to ask her school for anything. After calling the school repeatedly she had to go to one of her children’s schools to collect a £50 voucher - the school is in Peckham, she is in temporary accommodation in Crystal Palace. Again, there is some confusion as to why she hasn't been given £15 per week per child. Mother wasn’t asked what supermarket would be most convenient for her, so the voucher is for a supermarket that is not near to where she lives. Community worker is having to call the school to find out what is happening. She is still waiting to find out about her vouchers from the school attended by her second child.