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

Parent View
Mother in Hounslow
Contacted SFM as partner (main earner) had had to stop working due to Covid-19 restrictions. Had been advised that child would be eligible for FSM and hence the voucher scheme. Parent unsure what steps to take as child’s school was closed. SFM advised parent to get in touch with school and explain situation. Also advised to complete relevant form on borough website, but parent very concerned about length of time this might take even after reassurance that school could advise.

Parent from LB Richmond
‘I finally have at least one voucher. It’s such a help.’
Parent received link for second voucher on Monday 4 May and managed to redeem it very quickly – within just a few minutes. However, still not received first voucher which parent attempted to redeem last week (w/b 27/04/20) even though voucher is showing as having been redeemed on the school account. Parent has emailed Edenred, but has received no response as to where it is or what she should do.

Schools
Primary School in LB Richmond
Head reports that she has experienced little improvement of the system. Has lots of voucher codes to redeem but is still having very limited success, despite trying to access the system at different times of day and putting in the codes multiple times. Head has several batches of codes to redeem. Out of one batch of 37 codes she has only managed to redeem four to date. She assumes that this is due to system overload but is puzzled because she is trying to access the system at times when fewer people should be using it, such as 2am and 6.30am. Out of all batches of codes ordered, only two batches have been redeemed in their entirety. Head reports process is very time consuming and has probably taken up roughly 30 hours to date. She has a spreadsheet of codes and must cut and paste each one into the website. If she then receives an error message she must start again. Some codes are then accepted. Head has tried to get a response from Edenred as to why she repeatedly gets the error message but has had no response. Head noted that a message on the Edenred website mentions that site is due to be upgraded this weekend (9, 10 May) in order to improve the system. Head is dubious as similar message has been posted before and she has not noticed an improvement.

Head contacted local MP as she is frustrated. MP’s secretary told her that there was an MP hotline to Edenred and MP would contact Edenred on head’s behalf. Secretary promised a response within 24 hours, but head has heard nothing to date.
Head reports that she is managing to keep contact with vulnerable families at her school and is making sure that they are not hungry. She is supplying supplementary vouchers from other sources and sourcing food parcels. She is slightly concerned that some families may be too proud to ask for help. Head would rather cancel all of the vouchers she’s ordered and start afresh with a new scheme but she’s concerned about how this would be managed logistically.

She has heard that the parcels offered by her provider have now improved (school decided not to opt for these as first parcels were not satisfactory). However, head says that despite the improved content she still wouldn’t choose to opt for parcels as parents don’t want to come and collect them. Standing in a queue outside school is humiliating and parents don’t like to do it.

Head notes an increase in FSM children. To date an additional seven families have enquired, but six of these are still waiting to find out whether they qualify.

**Infant School in Leicester**

School business manager has found that system has improved over the last couple of weeks. Before Easter she was spending up to six hours trying access the system before she was successful. Now she is accessing it within 10-15 minutes.

Business manager reports that the system first became problematic for her when the announcement was made that vouchers could be ordered for the Easter break. She placed her order as soon as she heard, but this order of vouchers only came through this week (w/b 4/05/20). She is getting lots of emails and phone calls from anxious parents and some of them are getting quite angry. She has now ordered all the vouchers needed until the end of May as the delay between requesting the vouchers and the order being approved is taking so long. She is concerned as many of the families are in extreme need.

Main issue at her school is that many parents do not speak English at all, or only speak it as a second language. The system is just too complicated for them to understand. Initially she was ordering the vouchers to school to be collected, but many parents were too worried to come to the school to collect them, so she began sending the codes to parents so that they could download the vouchers at home. However, many are struggling with the instructions. The business manager is spending hours each day talking parents through the system and even then, she is finding that some of them can’t manage. She is having to print the vouchers for them at school. The benefit of them downloading the vouchers themselves is therefore lost as the families are still having to come to school to collect the vouchers. The parents are frustrated with the system and she is receiving many unhappy emails and phone calls every day.

School business manager reports an increase in FSM uptake. Up to 56 from 46.

**Caterers**

**Caterer in London**

Up until 20 March, caterer was responsible for 78 school contracts. During lockdown 45 of these schools have closed. In the 33 schools still open, caterer is providing meals for key worker and vulnerable/FSM children. Caterer reports that the numbers are low with between five and 25 diners per site per day. **Dunraven Primary School**: Catering for up to 25 key-worker children from the Dunraven, Van Gogh and Goldfinch School Trust. Each child receives a hot meal and a pudding. Caterer also
issues FSM bags once a week. This week caterer supplied 282 bags, of which 254 were collected and 28 were delivered directly to homes. Caterer reports that the number of FSM bags has been on a steady rise since lockdown began.

**Mulberry Trust**: Caterer provides approximately 25 daily meals to key-worker children and issues 120 FSM bags per week. Three weeks ago it only issued 75 bags, so there is a large increase.

**Duncombe Primary in Islington**: Caterer prepares and cooks over 100 meals per day for the children in the local community.  

**Al Langley Heritage Primary** (part of the Langley Academy Trust): School Catering Manager is providing a weekly, socially distanced cookery club for pupils attending the school. This has been tremendously popular with all the students.

Caterer is also working with Olio (a surplus food sharing network) preparing cooked meals for collection and delivery to vulnerable adults and children in the Kensington, Hammersmith and Fulham areas. Approximately 50 meals per day are being produced, all funded by a benefactor.

**Community Groups**

**Community Group – Lambeth**  
The group is delivering around 120 packed lunches each day, made by a catering company. This is funded by the Mayor’s Office as part of Kitchen Social. Waitrose and FareShare may offer some support, but the group is waiting for confirmation of this.

Families are referred to the group by schools, housing managers and neighbours. Around 20-30 meals are delivered to a local hub-school looking after key-worker children, the remaining meals are distributed by foot, bike or car to more than 25 families. Families at a greater distance receive a twice-weekly delivery, whilst more local families receive a daily delivery. The group is also delivering donations of vegetables, books and sanitary products. The work is being undertaken by local volunteers and two paid session staff under the guidance of one local manager.

All the recipient families have children of school age and the majority receive benefits. Some are newly plunged into crisis. Some have family members that suffer from a disability, either a parent or a child. Many are unable to access adequate shopping and cannot get deliveries. Some have many young children and are unable to reach the shops due to the ages of the children. They do not feel comfortable using public transport in the current crisis. This provision of ready-made food gives parents some respite from food preparation and poverty.

The group reports that the number of families in need is increasing each day. Families are grateful for the contact and appreciate the help with issues such as printing and the provision of paper and pens. The team is also making regular welfare calls to the families it normally supports at youth sessions. The manager reports that there is a lot of fear and concern amidst the families.