Parent view on continuation of support during the summer holidays

Mother in LB Richmond

“One thing the last 12 weeks has shown me is how much the low-income families are in desperate need of these vouchers and school meals. It’s got me thinking that people care and recognise that there is a need, not just during the pandemic, but once this is over. The pandemic has shown how it can be achieved, how much of a need there is and how much support there is out there for vulnerable families.”

Head teacher reactions to support during the summer holidays

Head of primary school in LB Southwark

“The government’s change of heart is tremendously important for parents of our disadvantaged pupils who are reliant on the vouchers. The present situation has left many of our families without work or access to state benefits.

From the possible ways to feed our vulnerable families, the Edenred vouchers work best. There have been technical difficulties, but on the whole they are the most accessible and convenient solution. We will have someone from our school office working throughout the school holidays to support families in accessing the vouchers.”

Head of primary school in LB Richmond

“I am delighted that the government has decided to extend the free school meal subsidy over the summer. Personally, having broken the back of the Edenred system, I think this is the way forward over the summer holidays, particularly as we have a month to prepare.

I am acutely aware that our FSM families have been disproportionately impacted by the lockdown. Amongst other inequalities they have not been able to travel to cheaper supermarkets as they require public transport to do so; food costs in local smaller supermarkets are higher, and having children at home for three months has not only meant providing a further meal a day, but also a snack – and my parents are telling me that their children are wanting to snack a lot! In addition, many parents who had a few hours of casual work have not been able to supplement their incomes. This looks set to stay for the moment. The government’s decision means that these families will have a small additional income to help cover these costs, contribute towards their weekly budget and get the best value for money.”

Head of primary school in LB Hammersmith and Fulham

We would favour a continuation of the voucher scheme as although it’s taken a while to set up we seem to have had success with it. I’d worry that anything through the LA would prove problematic and giving it all up front as a benefit payment might as not quite hit the mark.”
**Head of primary school in LB Wandsworth**

“My gut reaction is to stick with the Edenred scheme over the summer. It’s now up and running and is the easiest mechanism given how busy everyone is. Another alternative would be to give it to LAs to distribute through Wonde. That system seemed to run more smoothly and Wonde now have access to Sims spread sheets.”

**Head of primary school in LB Southwark**

“We are delighted about the government decision to continue to fund FSM during the summer holidays. We feel that although flawed, the Edenred system is already in place and is the best route forward. If we could make one change, however, it would be that we could make one payment at the beginning of the summer break to cover the whole holiday. Many schools may not have staff available to administer the vouchers on a weekly basis.

This scheme will have a massive impact on our vulnerable children and will go some way to help alleviate food poverty during the summer break. It will also mean a better diet (if used sensibly) for our children in Southwark where childhood obesity remains a concern. The scheme will at least give parents and carers the opportunity to buy fresh, healthy food.

We realise that this decision is a major celebration for us all, especially our children, but there remains a massive group of families who don’t reach the required threshold to qualify for free school meals and who have no recourse to public funds. The latter are only highlighted to us if a parent chooses to let us know they are in difficulties or if there is a safeguarding issue.”

**Schools on partial return**

**Infant school in Leicester**

Head teacher reports that the voucher scheme for FSM children is vital at present as many families at the school have very little. Finding the money to provide two, three or more meals for school-age children is very expensive. When the children are in school the parents have the security of knowing that at least they have one decent meal inside them – and they can have second helpings as well! Some of the children attending get very little for breakfast at home, so to provide a main midday meal is especially important. The school doesn’t allow packed lunches under normal circumstances, so when students are attending all of them will receive a hot meal.

Now that children are returning to school, the catering provider is looking to charge the average daily uptake, even though no meals are currently being made. Head understands that they have kept their staff on and that consequently they will need to be paid, but in the meantime the schools is paying, but no food is being supplied.

**Primary school in LB Southwark**

School has between 20 and 30 key worker and vulnerable children in school every day. About half of the Reception children started last week (approximately 30). Year Six are starting back on 17 June and Year One the following week. School is providing packed lunches to eat in the classroom because of safety measures. Normally the school cooks on site for all students. School has issued FSM vouchers through Tesco since lockdown began, sending them directly from school via a link to parents’ email addresses. An eligibility checker is run each week to check that all eligible children are included. This works well and has been well received by parents. School has also referred families to food banks and has also received the SFM/GSTC breakfast boxes which have been very well received.