



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

16th June 2020

Dear Constance,

RE: FREE SCHOOL MEALS - SUMMER 2020.

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of the Government's free school meals policy for the forthcoming summer holiday period - your comments upon which I have read with interest.

Like you, a number of local people have understandably written to me over the last couple of days on the issue of free school meals and asking what the Government's approach to this will be for disadvantaged and vulnerable children over the summer holiday period, owing to the unprecedented Coronavirus pandemic and the financial pressures that this has created for many families across the country. The footballer, Marcus Rashford, has also made an important contribution to this debate and I congratulate him on the impact he has made in leading this campaign.

We all appreciate and understand that many children and parents face an entirely unprecedented situation over the summer in the current circumstances, and I am very sympathetic to the need to put in place a further package of support to reflect that, exactly as you argue for. Indeed, I have actively relayed local concerns, and made this point, to various senior Ministers, including the Education Secretary who I spoke to yesterday evening.

Today, the Prime Minister has welcomely announced that to reflect this, we will be providing a 'Covid Summer Food Fund', which builds on the Department for Education funded scheme that saw free school meals exceptionally provided over the Easter and May half-term breaks, given the circumstances. This means that eligible young people will rightly have had an extra 9 weeks of free school meals this year, compared to normal.

Significant wider support has also been made available for children and families. On the 10th June the Prime Minister confirmed an additional £63 million to be distributed to local authorities in England to help those who are struggling to afford food and other essentials due to COVID-19. In addition, Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit have been uplifted by around £1,000 a year for the next 12 months as part of an injection of over £6.5 billion into the welfare system.

My understanding is in relation to today's announcement, that the Government will provide food vouchers covering the six-week holiday period, reflecting the unique circumstances of the pandemic. Those eligible will be those who already qualify for free school meals, payment will be through vouchers, using the scheme already in place, with a one-off six-week voucher given to eligible families at the end of term to use in their local supermarkets.

I have also enclosed a copy of a 'Dear Colleague' letter I have received from the Secretary of State for Education, the Rt. Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP, which sets this out in detail.



Beyond that, it remains our intention to get all pupils back into school in September, but I should add that the Department for Education's Holiday Activities & Food (HAF) programme will also be running this summer at a cost of £9 million, which will benefit thousands of disadvantaged children. The HAF scheme arranges provision in a range of local settings, including school premises.

I am grateful to all those locally, yourself included, who have taken the time to write to me about this important issue - this is a positive and very welcome announcement and I commend Ministers for it. This summer will likely be a challenging time for many families, and this will undoubtedly help.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tom Pursglove'.

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**