



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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To: All MPs in England

16 June 2020

Dear Colleague

Free School Meals

This Government spends over £550 million a year, through the National Funding Formula, providing free school meals for disadvantaged children and young people across England. Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, schools have continued to receive this funding and the Government has provided additional funding for the national voucher scheme to support children at home. As of 15 June, vouchers worth over £154 million have been redeemed by schools and families.

As schools open more widely, and their kitchens reopen, we expect schools to make food parcels available for collection or delivery for any children that are eligible for free school meals who are not yet able to return to school. Where this is not possible, schools can continue to offer vouchers to eligible pupils.

Provision for free school meals is ordinarily term time only. We fully understand that children and parents face an entirely unprecedented situation this summer, and thank Marcus Rashford for his work to highlight the difficulties which many families face. To reflect this, we will be providing a Covid Summer Food Fund. This will provide food vouchers covering the six-week holiday period.

Full details will be set out shortly, but this is a specific measure to reflect the unique circumstances of the pandemic. The scheme will not continue beyond the summer, and those eligible will be those who already qualify for free school meals.

The Government has made significant wider support available for children and families at this time. On 10 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, the Government has introduced an uplift to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit by around £1,000 a year for the next 12 months as part of an injection of over £6.5 billion by Government into the welfare system.

Additional support has been pledged by various departments across government with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) announcing the provision of £16 million for food support through charities, including FareShare and WRAP. DEFRA have also issued 2 million food packages to those who are shielding.

The Department for Education's Holiday Activities and Food programme ensures that thousands of disadvantaged children have access to enriching activities and nutritious healthy meals over the summer. This summer, the Department will again run the programme at a cost of £9 million.

More widely, the Government has supported families to cope with the impact of coronavirus by introducing a range of support measures, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme. Over 11.5 million people have been supported by these schemes, meaning that millions of families have continued to receive a pay cheque every month. Support has also been provided to help families pay their rent or mortgage, access sick pay, and delay tax payments.

As the Prime Minister has said, it is our intention to get all pupils back into school in September.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Williamson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education