

19<sup>th</sup> October 2020

*The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak, MP, The Chancellor of the Exchequer*  
*The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson, MP, Secretary of State for Education*  
*The Rt Hon Matt Hancock, MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*

Dear Ministers,

As school leaders we are well aware of the heavy burden our nation's children have had to bear during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our schools are now striving to ensure that our most disadvantaged children are not left behind. To help us do that, we must make sure that every child has the nutrition they need to be able to learn.

Each and every school day we see the impact free school meals have for those currently entitled. For many it is the only daily, hot, nutritious meal they have. We witness, first-hand, the effect they can have on improving school attendance, on children's health, and academic performance. A healthy school meal also helps improve children's concentration during afternoon lessons, with positive knock-on effects on classroom behaviour.

Conversely, we also see the devastating impact of children from poorer households coming to school unable to afford to buy a school lunch, because their family circumstances or immigration status mean they fall outside the existing free school meal eligibility criteria. Families are suffering the economic costs of COVID-19, meaning many more are now struggling to afford school lunches or give their children enough food during the holidays. This discrimination is an anathema and a real barrier to learning.

This summer has highlighted the importance of ensuring vulnerable children have access to high quality holiday activity and food provision. But schools administering holiday food vouchers are not a long-term fix. Appropriate, long-term, mechanisms must be put into place in the holidays to ensure that children don't fall behind and have an unfair disadvantage when coming back to school.

As recommended in Part 1 of the National Food Strategy, the Government need to patch up their 'nutritional safety net'. We therefore back the following policy calls for the Comprehensive Spending Review.

- 1.) Expand free school meals to all children and young people whose families are on Universal Credit or equivalent benefits, including those children from families with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).** Raising the current threshold will mean an additional 1.5 million children from the poorest households will be able to benefit.
- 2.) Extend the holiday activity and food provision to all children in receipt of free school meals in England.** Whilst Local Authorities are best placed to administer the scheme, we value the benefit it offers for pupils returning to schools after the holiday break. An additional 1.1-2 million children would be covered through this extension.

Our schools are invested in tackling ongoing inequalities which have been further exposed as a result of the pandemic. Ensuring our nation's children can eat well, in school and in holiday time, without stigma or family financial worries, is critical to their future health, wealth and wellbeing. Not doing so risks hundreds of thousands of children going hungry this winter and will be counter-productive to all other measures being put in place in schools.

These two important policy interventions are a quick, effective and highly targeted way of delivering on the levelling-up agenda and will support schools in delivering vital educational outcomes for all children.

Yours sincerely,

Geoff Barton	Association of School and College Leaders
Nick Brook	National Association of Headteachers
Paul Whiteman	National Association of Headteachers
Emma Knight	National Governance Association
Russell Hobby	Teach First
Emma Bradshaw	Alternative Learning Trust
Dr Penny Barratt	The Bridge London Trust
Steve Taylor	Cabot Learning Federation
Julian Drinkall	Academies Enterprise Trust
Debbie Clinton	Academy Transformation Trust
Rowena Hackwood	Astrea Academy Trust
Jon Chaloner	GLF Schools
David Morris	Heart Academies Trust
Elizabeth Wolverson	LDBS Academies Trust
Rev Steve Chalke	Oasis Global
Mark Jordan	Parallel Learning Trust
Michael Thorpe	Penine Academy Trust
Catherine Barr	The Shared Learning Trust
Hamid Patel	Star Academies
Susan Douglas	The Eden Academy
Chris Tomlinson	The Co-Operative Academies
Jennifer Blunden	Truro & Penwith Academy Trust
Tim Coulson	Unity Schools Partnership
Gavin Ball	Wessex Learning Trust
Leah Crawley	Burnt Ash Primary School
Tim Baker	Charlton Manor Primary School
Euan Ferguson	Isleworth & Syon School
Dr Janice Howkins	Bentley Wood High School for Girls
Jane Palmer	Byron Court Primary School
Robert Watkins	Carew Academy
Lucy Peake	Herbert Morrison Primary
Emyr Fairburn	Kings Cross Academy
Sarah Botchway	Vauxhall Primary School