

20th October 2022

The Rt Hon Liz Truss, MP, Prime Minister
The Rt Hon Kit Malthouse, MP, Secretary of State for Education
The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer

Dear Ministers,

We are writing to you as representatives of over one million teachers, school and trust leaders, support staff, and governors and trustees in the nation's 24,400 schools. We are well placed to see the impact of the continuing cost of living crisis on our 8.9 million pupils' ability to learn and lead healthy lives.

We wrote to the Government earlier this year in May, to ask for a commitment to an expansion of free school meals in order to reach all those children missing out on the nutrition they need to learn and thrive. We have received no reply, and as we embark on our new school year we only see the situation for the pupils in our schools getting worse.

We continue to see far too many families struggling to afford to pay for school meals as they fall outside the restrictive free school meal eligibility criteria. We continue to see far too many children facing the devastating stigma of sitting in dining halls with inadequate packed lunches. The situation is getting worse on a daily basis - hunger is now a real issue in our schools.

Every single school professional is focused on ensuring 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 and thrive. Not doing so would undermine all the great efforts of the education workforce to tackle inequalities, and support your government's growth agenda.

Latest data from the Child Poverty Action Group shows that over 800,000 of our most disadvantaged pupils do not qualify for free school meals. That works out as one full class in every one of our schools.

We urge you to act. Now is the right moment for the government to commit to an expansion of free school meals, targeting the children in poverty who would benefit the most. The clear solution to ensuring fairness and equity across our schools is to extend universal provision, in line with Wales and Scotland. But as an immediate first step, free school meals must be expanded to all families receiving universal credit (or an equivalent benefit).

We urge you to meet with us and ask you to contact Caroline Cerny on caroline.cerny@biteback2030.com

Yours sincerely,

Geoff Barton, General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL)
Dr Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney, Joint General Secretaries, National Education Union (NEU)
Dr Nicholas Capstick, Principal of Drove Primary School, and CEO of White Horse Federation Trust and
Chair, School Food Review Working Group
Leora Cruddas, CEO, Confederation of School Trusts (CST)
Russell Hobby, CEO, Teach First
Emma Knight, CEO, National Governance Association (NGA)
Christina McAnea, General Secretary, UNISON
Stephen Morales, CEO, Institute of School Business Leadership (ISBL)
Dr Patrick Roach, General Secretary, NASUWT
Steve Taylor, Chair, Queen Street Group and CEO, Cabot Learning Federation
Paul Whiteman, General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)