



2021-0005827POSoS

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe

Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
By email: george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

14 April 2021

Thank you for your email of 14 January, on behalf of a number of your constituents, about lunch parcels during the national lockdown for children eligible for free school meals (FSM). I apologise for the delay in responding.

We are committed to ensuring that no child should go hungry as a result of the measures that we have introduced to protect the NHS and save lives. Ensuring that children get the energy and nutrition they need continues to be of the utmost importance. The government has continued to provide schools with their expected funding, including funding to cover benefits-related FSM and universal infant FSM, throughout this period.

Let me be very clear that the photos shared on social media of certain lunch parcels are completely unacceptable and do not reflect the high standard of lunch parcel we expect to be sent to children. We have met with a number of school caterers to ensure they are delivering high quality lunches to eligible children. By doing this, we will make sure every one of them receives a healthy and nutritious lunch that will give them the fuel they need to focus on learning at home.

The government does not hold any direct contracts with school catering companies. The operation of school food is managed at a local level. However, our guidance, which is available at: tinyurl.com/vu2ub7f, is clear that lunch parcels should contain items which parents can use to prepare healthy lunches for their child/children across the week, not rely on parents having additional ingredients at home to prepare meals, and not contain items restricted under the school food standards.

In the first instance, if a parent is concerned about the standards of their lunch parcel they should speak directly with their school. We ask schools to work collaboratively with their school food suppliers to ensure high standards are in place. If the contract is held at Multi Academy Trust (MAT) or local authority (LA) level, we ask that the school engage with the contract holder to ensure the contract expectations are upheld.

Parents should continue to liaise with their school, providing regular feedback on the parcels they receive. All schools have direct links to their suppliers, so they are best placed to deal with concerns quickly and effectively. However, if a parent remains dissatisfied with the response from their school and caterer, they can inform my department by contacting our helpline on 0800 046 8687.

Any support provided since 4 January 2021, through lunch parcels or locally arranged vouchers, can be claimed back from my department. A copy of our current guidance is available at: tinyurl.com/Y4ezuw7r.

Now schools are fully open, all children should be able to access a nutritious meal at school, free to those that are eligible for FSM.

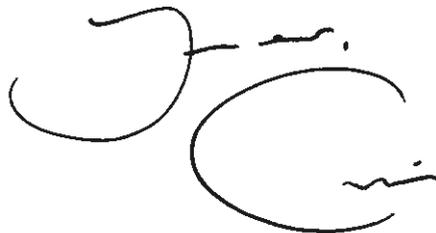
Where pupils eligible for benefits-related FSM are required to stay at home, schools should work with their school catering team or food provider to offer good quality lunch parcels. This is the same arrangement that was in place throughout the autumn term.

To further support schools during this period, we will continue to provide an additional £3.50 per lunch parcel per week until the start of the Easter holidays.

We recognise that this is a challenging year for everyone, especially for those who have lost their jobs and those families who are feeling the extra strain. I would appreciate it if you would also highlight the following your constituents, which may be of further assistance:

- If families need urgent help, they can contact their local council to find out what services are available in their area. Further information is available at: tinyurl.com/Y4th6hPe.
- The COVID Winter Grant Scheme was announced on 8 November and is now being delivered by LAs to support vulnerable families in need this winter and beyond. This will be extended until the end of the Easter holidays (16 April 2021).

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education