



2023-0032609NGPO

The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister for Schools

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

25 September 2023

Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 13 September, addressed to the Secretary of State, enclosing correspondence from your constituent, regarding school food. I am replying as the Minister for Schools.

The Government wants pupils to be healthy and well nourished. We encourage a balanced diet and healthy life choices through school funding, legislation, and guidance. The standards for school food are set out in the requirements for 'School Food Regulations 2014' and aim to ensure that schools offer children healthy food and drink options that provide the energy and nutrition they need throughout the school day.

The requirement in the school food standards to serve meat and dairy products applies to all schools. We are aware that for some faith schools, vegetarianism is an important part of that faith. There may, therefore, be cases where there is no demand for meat and dairy products from any of the school's parents or pupils, and in such instances, it would not be realistic to expect the school to produce meat or dairy based meals that will not be consumed.

The Government's school food standards regulate the food and drink provided at lunchtime and at other times of the school day. Beyond this, head teachers, school governors, and caterers are best placed to make decisions about their school food policies, taking into account local circumstances and the needs of their pupils. In doing so, we expect schools to make reasonable adjustments for pupils with particular requirements, for example to reflect dietary and cultural needs. School food policies work best when schools discuss them with parents and pupils, so that parents have the opportunity to raise pupils' particular dietary needs.

We believe that the current standards provide a robust yet flexible framework to ensure that pupils in England continue to receive high quality and nutritious food, that builds healthy eating habits for life. We are keeping the standards under review.

In February 2022, the Levelling Up White Paper outlined a number of ways the Department is strengthening adherence with the standards. This includes piloting work with the Food Standards Agency, investing up to £200,000 in a pilot governor training scheme, and encouraging schools to develop and publish a policy on their school websites setting out their whole school approach to food.

We have committed to support schools to improve their sustainable practices on food. Schools can voluntarily follow the Government buying standards, which includes advice regarding sustainable sourcing. The Government also recognises the importance of plant based foods from a health, cultural and environmental point of view. The school food regulations already allow schools the freedom to provide plant based meals as needed. Meat must be served on three or more days each week and beyond this, schools may provide a meal with any other type of protein every day should they choose.

Yours sincerely,

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

The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister for Schools