



Nadhim Zahawi MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

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Dear Headteacher

I know that teachers, staff and governors work really hard to ensure that children can access healthy food while in school. My department is fully supportive of this. Like you, we want to ensure that all children can enjoy healthy food every day and develop healthy eating habits that will stay with them throughout their lives. We have established a £26 million programme to set up or improve over 1,700 Breakfast Clubs in schools; and our £9 million Holiday Activities and Food programme is exploring how we can better support children and young people during the school holidays.

With this ambition in mind, I am writing to draw your attention to the recent report from the [Children's Future Food Inquiry](#) and its [#Right2Food charter](#). The inquiry explored the food situation of disadvantaged children across the UK, and its report places a central focus on the voices of children and young people.

On 25 April I attended the launch of the report and had the privilege to meet some of its Young Food Ambassadors. Their report raises some important issues and I would urge you to read it and consider whether your school is doing all it can to ensure pupils are able to enjoy healthy food at school.

Many schools are already delivering excellent practice in this area, including creative menu options, a focus on healthy eating across the curriculum and making it easy for children to enjoy free school meals. I will consider carefully how the Government can share and build on this positive work.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight some particular issues raised by the Inquiry:

- **A positive lunchtime experience:** Children highlighted the importance of an enjoyable and relaxing lunchtime experience. They want the school dining area to be a welcoming place where pupils can socialise, and would like a genuine voice in shaping their school meals. Children placed a high value on affordable healthy choices, avoiding queues and having enough time and space to eat with their peers.
- **Avoiding stigma:** No child should feel stigmatised because they are entitled to free school meals. I know that many schools use cashless

systems and other methods to ensure that children who are eligible for free school meals are not identified separately. However, I would encourage you consider whether there is more that can be done, including ensuring that there is no limit on the choice available to free school meal pupils.

- **Access to free drinking water:** I was shocked to hear some young people report that they do not have access to free drinking water at school and often have buy a bottle of water. Schools are legally obliged to provide access at all times to free drinking water on the school premises. I would urge you to consider whether you need to do more to make free water as easily available and as visible as you can. I would also encourage the use of refillable bottles, alongside other steps to reduce single-use plastics.

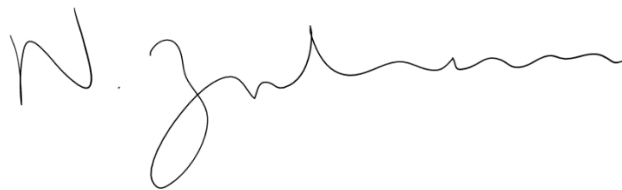
The Government has published several useful pieces of guidance to support schools in their school meal provision.

- The School Food Plan developed a [range of practical resources](#) for schools to make sure healthy options are always available.
- Public Health England has a [range of nutrition resources](#) across subject areas, designed to encourage pupils to build healthier habits for life.
- Our [free school meals guidance](#) explains the eligibility criteria, and includes model registration forms to help schools identify and register eligible pupils.
- Compliance with the [School Food Standards](#) is mandatory for all maintained schools. We also expect all academies and free schools to comply, and since 2014 we have made this an explicit requirement in their funding agreements.

I am very keen to share the excellent work that many schools are already delivering to support healthy eating. If you have some outstanding examples of good practice happening in your school, please get in touch to let us know, by writing to: healthy.pupils@education.gov.uk

I will provide a formal response to the recommendations in the Children's Future Food Inquiry report in the 2019 autumn term. In the meantime, thank you for reading this letter and for all your work in supporting children to lead healthy lives.

Yours faithfully



Nadhim Zahawi MP
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