

Lynne Neagle AS/MS  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg  
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1442  
Ein cyf/Our ref LN/05451/24

Jack Sargeant MS  
Chair - Petitions committee  
Senedd Cymru  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

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26 June 2024

Dear Jack,

**Petition P-06-1442 Extend Universal Free School Meals to secondary schools.**

Thank you for your letter dated 23 May 2024 regarding the petition from Unite Community Cardiff and Area Branch calling for Universal Free School Meals in secondary schools.

I am delighted that twenty local authorities have now completed the rollout of Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM) to all learners in Reception to Year 6, including those who provide meals to full-time nursery learners. The two remaining local authorities, Swansea, and Bridgend plan to deliver to Year 6 from September 2024.

As a government, we are using every lever available to us to support families that need it most. Our immediate focus, and the focus of our partners, is on extending entitlement through the delivery of UPFSM. In delivering this commitment we are learning valuable lessons, including issues such as special diets, and what further support and guidance may be required to help schools fully support learners with healthcare needs. This will inform any further changes to our free school meal offer, should budget become available in the future.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

However, unfortunately, our current budget will only go so far due the fact the UK Government has not provided an adequate funding settlement for Wales. Overall, our budget is worth £700m less in real terms than when it was set in 2021 and we must make some very difficult choices to ease the extraordinary pressures on the budget. Despite this, we continue to prioritise support to those who need it most. During 2022-23 and 2023-24, we have allocated support worth more than £3.3billion through programmes which go towards helping protect disadvantaged households and support putting money back into families' pockets.

Additionally, our Child Poverty Strategy will set out our ambitions for the longer term and will outline how we will work across Government and with partners to maximise the impact of the levers available to us to reduce child poverty and to mitigate the worst effects of child poverty.

We continue to encourage all families and individuals in Wales to claim what they are entitled to, particularly as cost-of-living rises continue to impact. Our communication and marketing campaigns continue to promote take-up of eligible free school meals (eFSM), encouraging parents to check their eligibility for free school meals and the School Essentials Grant. The campaign also promotes and encourages the uptake of the UPFSM offer, which is a demand led grant.

Rolling out our UPFSM commitment at the same time as our new curriculum provides us with an exciting opportunity to shift our food culture and reiterate the importance of supporting the procurement and promotion of local, sustainable, and healthy food.

Regarding fair work, local authorities in Wales have all signed up to the Code of Practice on Ethical Employment in Supply Chains, first published in 2017, and in doing so have committed to addressing risks of slavery and exploitation in supply chains.

The first piece of primary legislation on public procurement was passed in the Senedd last year. The Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act (Wales) 2023 includes duties on socially responsible procurement. When these duties come into force, local authorities will be required to collect information and report annually on how they are achieving well-being outcomes through procurement. This will include embedding the principles of fair work and global responsibility in procurement and contract management processes.

For learners, the new Curriculum already includes mandatory statements of what matters for the Humanities Area with explicit references to sustainability and the environment, to ensure engagement with challenges around our impact on the natural world across the curriculum.

Learners are encouraged to understand their own impact on the natural world. This empowers schools to consider food production and consumption on a local and global scale to understand the causes, consequences and significance of their actions allowing learners to engage with questions about food sustainability and sources.

Further, the Eco-Schools programme in Wales run by Keep Wales Tidy operates in over 90% of schools and aims to help children and young people engage directly with their environment, learn about climate change and the value of our natural resources, and develop sustainable behaviours. Many schools engage with food growing projects as part of their ECO-schools' journey.

And lastly, Chapter 1 of the [Healthy Eating in maintained schools: statutory guidance](#) focuses on the role of the school governing body and the local authority in promoting

healthy eating and drinking, under the Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure. We will shortly be reviewing this guidance ensuring the latest evidence is considered and we encourage all partners to engage with the process in due course.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lynne Neagle'.

**Lynne Neagle AS/MS**

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Cabinet Secretary for Education