

Jane Hutt MS

Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief

Whip

Welsh Government

27 March 2025

Dear Jane,

Social Cohesion: eligibility for free school meals

We held a stakeholder session on 17 March as part of our inquiry into social cohesion. We discussed a range of matters including the relationship between the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) policy, the attainment gap and free school meals.

We understand that in England, the Government has extended free school meal eligibility to children in all households with NRPF, subject to maximum income thresholds. In Wales, however, local authorities are “encouraged to use their discretion to provide free school meals to any child who is not automatically entitled due to their parents’ immigration status.”¹ We heard fears that the discretionary approach adopted in Wales risks widening the attainment gap and exacerbating inequalities in educational and health outcomes. We would be grateful if you could please explain

1. Why the Welsh Government believes a discretionary approach is preferable to an automatic entitlement;
2. Detail of how the Welsh Government is encouraging local authorities to provide free school meals;
3. Detail of how the Welsh Government is monitoring the local authority response including levels of take-up to ensure that the guidance is being interpreted fairly and consistently.

I would welcome a response within usual timescales; I am copying this letter to Buffy Williams MS, Chair of the Children, Young People, and Education Committee.

¹ Welsh Government, [Free school meals: information for local authorities and schools](#)



Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jenny Rathbone". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jenny" and the last name "Rathbone" clearly legible.

Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

