



Education Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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From Robert Halfon MP, Chair

Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

Department for Education

Great Smith Street

London

SW1P 3BT

Friday 12 June 2020

Dear Vicky,

At our meeting on Wednesday we discussed the Government's decision not to provide free school meal vouchers over the school summer holiday period. We appreciate that ordinarily children would only have free school meals while attending school.

Nevertheless, we know that many families will be facing new hardships this summer and so we wish to consider the extra financial support that is being targeted at children living in families who are entitled to free school meals.

In his statement to the House this week, the Secretary of State referred to the £6.5 billion of extra welfare support for the most vulnerable families in place for one year as a result of the current crisis, which we understand equates to a weekly £20 rise to all on Universal Credit. It would therefore be helpful if you could confirm what assessment the Treasury have made on how much better off the Government estimate a family with two children will be on average per week on Universal Credit following the recent benefit and tax credit increases, disregarding any housing elements to the credit.

During PMQs, the Prime Minister announced £63 million for local authorities to assist those struggling to afford food and other essentials. It would be helpful if you could define what is meant by "essentials". It would also be helpful to know what assessment the Government has made in terms of how many families with children this additional funding will support over the school holiday period. Also, what assessment has been made of the percentage of families who would qualify for free school meals who will not receive extra support through this local authority provision.

Finally, could you please also confirm that any family facing food hunger will be guaranteed access to these funds, so that their children can be properly fed over the summer, including the position of those families with no recourse to public funds.

We wish to consider this issue with some urgency and so it would be helpful to receive a response by 22 June.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Walpole". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

Chair of the Education Committee