



Catherine McKinnell MP
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Helen Hayes MP

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Dear Helen,

Thank you for your letter of 10th April requesting that I provide further information on the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill following debate during the Commons Report stage last month. First, I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you, and members of the Education Select Committee for your ongoing engagement, challenge and support of this important bill as it has progressed through Parliament.

I have set out responses to each of your queries in turn.

What is the mechanism by which the early adopter programme is capturing information on the accessibility of breakfast clubs to children with special educational needs and disabilities?

The 750 early adopter schools selected includes 44 special schools and alternative provision, ensuring we test and learn in the full range of settings. We will monitor the take-up of early adopter breakfast clubs among different cohorts of children, including those with SEND. It is a requirement of the grant, that schools provide data on pupils taking up a breakfast club, this will allow the department to understand if and how take-up differs between cohorts. The implementation evaluation will also explore any issues around accessibility for children with SEND.

How do you plan to share the information captured by the programme on this point; and what are the criteria against which you will assess whether breakfast clubs are accessible to children with SEND?

Findings from the evaluation will inform the department as to whether clubs are accessible to children with SEND and, if necessary, what can be done to further improve this. Findings will be published in due course.

Can you provide more information on the "new eligibility checking system" for children eligible for free school meals? Who is responsible for performing checks? How are checks performed? What is done with this information?

The current Eligibility Checking System allows for only Local Authorities to carry out checks on behalf of a parent and school. The duty to establish eligibility for free

school meals rests with the school, however many schools choose to work closely with their local authorities on this.

Government is pressing ahead with the development of an upgraded Eligibility Checking System which will enable a parent/carer to instantly see if they are eligible, by simply inputting their name, Date of Birth and National Insurance Number, at which point they can send their application directly to the school.

School professionals will also be able to support parents by carrying out checks on their behalf. Parents will need to give consent in order for schools and their LA to see the result of their check.

The system is flexible in that schools, LAs or parents can perform an eligibility check. Once a check is performed the details of eligible children will be visible to the school and the LA, enabling the school to offer the meal to the child and record that child on the School Census for DfE to fund.

The new system is not intended to place additional burdens on parents or schools but to provide a more direct route to establish FSM eligibility. We expect the new system to be fully rolled out by September 2026.

Please write to the Committee with the results of your civil servants' work with (a) DSIT on options for further data sharing and (b) the Department for Work and Pensions on supporting enrolment through universal credit. When do you expect to be able to provide this information?

Officials continue to work closely with DSIT on options for further data sharing as well as the Department for Work and Pensions on supporting enrolment through the universal credit system. The aim of both of these initiatives is to support children who are currently entitled to free meals but are not claiming them to receive this support.

Data sharing would support local authorities led approaches to enable better identification of who is eligible for FSM but not claiming and provide targeted support.

Enrolment through the Universal Credit system would minimise burdens on parents to apply for FSM by using an existing touchpoint with parents for them to give consent to have their eligibility checked for FSM.

We will write to the Committee to update on this work in due course.

What mechanism will you use to monitor the impact of the policies on increasing take-up of free school meals? What criteria are you using to assess whether any increase in take-up is sufficient or whether further measures are needed? How will you engage with local authorities, including those which have been piloting approaches to auto-enrolment at a local level?

As with all government programmes, we keep free school meals policy under review. As part of this we will monitor the impact of our policy initiatives to boost take up by

reviewing the termly school census returns which gives us updated numbers on FSM uptake. We will also obtain a more granular picture of take up through engaging with local authorities by discussing directly with local authorities, engaging with local authority representative groups, and continuing to speak to stakeholders who have been leading on pilots with local authorities.

By what date do you expect to be able to update the House and write to us on the result of these policies on free school meals?

Subject to deliverability, we expect these policies to be in place by September 2026. We will therefore first be able to monitor the impact of these policies from the Autumn 2026 school census. As the policies become more established, census returns in subsequent years will provide a more accurate picture on the impact of these policies.

What form will the post-implementation review/impact assessment take? Over what period of time do expect to conduct it? When do you expect to publish it, and in what form?

As is usual practice, we will conduct a post-implementation review of the Act when the policies have properly had time to settle. It is important we time this review appropriately as some measures will require secondary legislation to implement and then roll out and we also need to collect data and evidence to inform the review.

Usual HMG practice for post-implementation reviews is to begin an assessment three to five years after Royal assent.

Once again, thank you for your ongoing support and engagement on this Bill, and I look forward to the Bill's progress through the second house.

Yours,



Catherine McKinnell MP
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