

Plans set out to support pupils eligible for free school meals

Low-income families whose children are eligible for free school meals will be offered vouchers, food or meals to make sure they continue receiving this support, even if they are no longer attending school due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The Government has today, Thursday 19 March, published guidance for schools giving them the flexibility to provide meals or shop vouchers to the 1.3 million disadvantaged children entitled to free school meals if they are no longer attending school, either due to closures or as a result of self-isolating at home.

Schools will be able to provide meals or vouchers for supermarkets or local shops, which can be sent directly to families who are either self-isolating at home or whose schools are closed on government advice. This follows the Education Secretary's announcement on Wednesday that schools will close from Monday until further notice, except for children of key workers and vulnerable children.

The Government has also confirmed that the total value of vouchers offered to each eligible child per week will exceed the rate it pays to schools for free school meals, recognising that families will not be buying food in bulk and may therefore incur higher costs.

The [guidance](#) for schools states they can choose to support eligible children however they believe is most appropriate and headteachers can decide which of the available options will be best for families in their area.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Our school leaders and teachers are central to the country's response to these unprecedented challenges, and I want to thank them for their calm resilience in the face of adversity. I am reassured by the support they continue to offer all families, particularly the most disadvantaged.

No child who would ordinarily receive a free school meal should go without this while their school is closed or while they are having to self-isolate at home. By giving headteachers flexibility on how they can get meals or shop vouchers to these children, they can make the most appropriate decisions for families in their communities, and provide immediate reassurance that this important support will continue.

Effective immediately, schools will be able to order vouchers directly from supermarkets or shops in their communities to be emailed or printed and

posted to families, and they will have their costs covered by the Department for Education.

A national approach to providing these supermarket and shop vouchers is being developed. Further details, including the total values being provided, will be provided shortly via the published guidance.

The Government's decision will provide immediate reassurance to families across England that they can still access this support even in the event of having to self-isolate at home or while schools are closed on the Government's advice.