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The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister for Schools

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Mr Virendra Sharma MP
By email: sharmav@parliament.uk

9 May 2023

Dear Virendra,

Thank you for your letter of 14 April, regarding free school meals.

The Education Act 1996 places a duty on maintained schools and academies to provide nutritious, free meals to pupils that meet the eligibility criteria, which includes being a registered pupil of a state funded school. Free school meal provision should be made to eligible pupils either on the school premises or at any other place where education is being provided. This provision could, for example, take the form of lunch parcels or vouchers.

Local authorities are funded to support children with special needs, including those who are unable to attend school on a long term basis. Parents are advised to speak to their local authority to consider suitable alternatives in line with the guidance on long term illnesses. This is available at: tinyurl.com/mwkb96nm.

The Department's guidance on free school meals supports schools and local authorities in delivering this provision.

The Department expects schools to act reasonably in ensuring that their food provision accounts for medical, dietary, and cultural needs. We have published statutory guidance, 'Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions', which describes the steps schools may take, such as the establishment of individual healthcare plans which may include special diets. The guidance is available at: tinyurl.com/YtztYe46.

Yours sincerely,

The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
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