



WORDS FROM WESTMINSTER

Friday 12th September 2014

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PMQs: Free school meals 11.09.14

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North, Lab): Is it acceptable for young people to be fed takeaway pizza at lunchtime because the Government have failed to prepare schools properly for the introduction of free nutritious meals?

William Hague: To put that into perspective, I think the latest figure is that 98.5% of schools are now providing a hot meal to infants as they were intended to do, and it is going up all the time. There are, of course, Government funds to help schools that need new facilities to do that, so I think it would be right to welcome the entirety of the picture, rather than try to find fault with one small aspect of it.

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Education: Free schools meals 08.09.14

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South, Labour): To ask the Secretary of State for Education if she will place in the Library all assessments her Department has conducted on the planning and implementation of providing free school meals to all infants; and if she will make a statement.

David Laws (Yeovil, Liberal Democrat): Evidence collected from local authorities and 14 multi-academy trusts between 11 August and 22 August 2014 suggested that 98.5% of schools would be providing hot meals from the start of term.

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Northern Ireland: Written answers

Mr B Mcelduff (West Tyrone, Sinn Fein):

To ask the Minister of Education to detail the level of uptake of free school meals and school uniform grant assistance in the (a) Omagh; and (b) Strabane districts and to outline his Department's efforts to ensure that there is full uptake of free school meals and school uniform grants in each Education and Library Board area.

Mr J O'dowd (Upper Bann, Sinn Fein):

The uptake of free school meals and entitlement to free school meals are measured on the day the school census and school meals census are carried out. The level of uptake of free school meals in schools in the Omagh and Strabane District Council areas for 2013/14 is as follows:

Notes: 1. The census figures provide a snapshot of the position on the day on which the census information is gathered. 2. Figures exclude special schools. Data on pupils entitled to free school meals in special schools is not validated. Entitlement to free school meals generally brings with it entitlement to receive the school uniform grant (with the exception of nursery school pupils) as the eligibility criteria used are similar. The Western Education and Library Board has confirmed that 2,676 pupils attending schools in the Omagh District Council area and 2,283 pupils in the Strabane District Council area were awarded a school uniform allowance in the 2013/14 school year (figures exclude special schools). A number of actions are being taken forward by my Department, working with the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) and the School Catering Service, to ensure that all those entitled to receive free school meals and the school uniform grant receive these important benefits. For example, the Resource Allocation Plans for each of the ELBs include targets to maintain or increase the uptake of all school meals and of free school meals. Each year the ELBs issue press releases, send out renewal applications and issue letters and posters to schools, the Social Security Agency, the Citizens Advice Bureau and libraries. The School Catering Service continuously seeks to increase uptake of school meals undertaking a range of activities including, for example, the installation of cashless catering systems in a number of post-primary schools to reduce any stigma associated with free school meals, sending menus home and placing these on school websites, providing meal deals, arranging theme days and taster sessions for parents and pupils. My officials are also working with colleagues in the Department for Social Development to take forward a joint project to encourage the uptake of free school meals as part of the work of the Inter-Departmental Group on Benefit Uptake (IDGBU). I am pleased to advise that I have also extended the Working Tax Credit eligibility criterion for free school meals and school uniforms to post-primary pupils from

September 2014. This will benefit an estimated additional 15,000 children from lower income households. I would encourage all families entitled to free school meals and the school uniform grant to take up their entitlement.

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