

How is this not just a U turn on free school meals?

We've always been clear that we will adapt our approach to support as the pandemic evolves, including our support for those on low incomes who need it over the winter months.

We believe schools shouldn't be an extension of the welfare state – we should allow our schools and teachers to focus on supporting the education and development of their students, and not expect them to solve all wider societal issues.

Instead, local authorities who understand local need and the different groups that need support are best placed to ensure that appropriate support is provided.

The £170m fund will not only make sure that no child goes hungry over Christmas, but also that a variety of different locally identified needs are catered for. It builds on the £63m previously allocated to Local Authorities to support groups who are helping people who are struggling to afford food and other essentials due to COVID-19.

Is everybody who would've got a free school meal eligible?

Yes, but the Covid Winter Grant Scheme recognises that more people may feel under pressure this winter and will allow local authorities to support a wider group of vulnerable people including those without children and children who are not currently eligible for Free School Meals.

The Holiday Activity and Food programme for 2021 will be available to children eligible for Free School Meals.

How will local authorities be able to spend the Covid Winter Support Grants?

We want to support local authorities as much as possible. Local authorities are best placed to decide how best to support local people in need. We are allowing them to spend the money in a variety of different ways, including direct cash payments, vouchers, giving meals to those in need or boosting funding for organisations already doing so.

Many local authorities already offer local welfare assistance and will have experience in putting in place local support arrangements and in assessing individual needs.

Will all children in England be eligible for a place at a Holiday Activities and Food programme?

The Holiday Activities and Food Scheme will make free places available to children eligible for Free School Meals in their local authority for a minimum of 4 hours a day, 4 days a week, 6 weeks a year. This would cover four weeks in the summer and a week's worth of provision in each of the Easter and Christmas holidays.

Local authorities will have flexibility about how they deliver this provision to best serve the needs of families in their area. For example, in the Christmas and Easter holidays, local areas could spread a week's worth of provision across a two-week period.

We expect that around a fifth of eligible children would take up the offer based on what we have seen during the pilot stage. We also encourage councils to make the holiday clubs available to any children not eligible for Free School Meals who can pay to attend.

How will funding be distributed/how will it work?

The Holiday Activities and Food Scheme will be delivered through grants to local authorities, who will be responsible for coordinating provision in their areas. We encourage them to work with schools, childcare providers, third-sector partners, food suppliers, sports and arts organisations, corporate sponsors and other groups who can enhance this provision.

Funding to local authorities would reflect the participation rate among eligible children, based on what we have seen in the pilot stage. We will encourage local areas to also make the holiday clubs available for any non-Free School Meal child who can pay to go along.

Further information on the delivery model and funding will follow shortly.