

8th October 2015

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about universal infant free school meals.

Despite recent media speculation to the contrary, I can assure you the Prime Minister has publicly stated his commitment to Free School Meals in England. This is something we committed to clearly in our manifesto and I am very proud that this important scheme will continue.

Every child in the first three years of school is eligible for a free school meal. This will help every child from every background get the best possible start in life and I am glad these children will be able to sit down to a healthy lunch with their classmates every day.

Pilot studies showed that, where children were given free school meals, on top of the academic benefits there were social benefits. Pupils were sitting down together and learning table manners including using cutlery effectively, and eating similar foods regardless of their background which helped foster a sense of cohesion. Children were also more likely to eat vegetables rather than unhealthy snacks.

Over £1 billion has been provided by the Government to meet the costs of the meals over the next two years and £150 million of capital has been made available to schools and local authorities to help them build new kitchens or increase dining capacity where necessary. A further £22.5 million has been provided specifically to help smaller schools provide free school meals and a dedicated support service has also been set up to offer advice and help.

The legislation introducing universal free school meals for infants has a power to extend the policy to additional year groups in future, meaning this is an area that can be kept under review going forward.

Nonetheless, I have written to George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer, to make him aware of constituents' concerns about this matter ahead of the announcement of the Spending Review.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Alok Sharma MP