



Lord Agnew Kt DL

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System
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Baroness Lister of Burtersett
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

Dear Baroness Lister,

ZAK May 2019

Thank you for your email and contribution on the oral parliamentary question covering the delivery of free school meals on 22 May. I want to be clear that there is absolutely no reason for schools to stigmatise children by limiting choice for free school meal pupils at lunchtime.

We are determined to give every child, regardless of their background, the very best start in life and Free school meals are key to this.

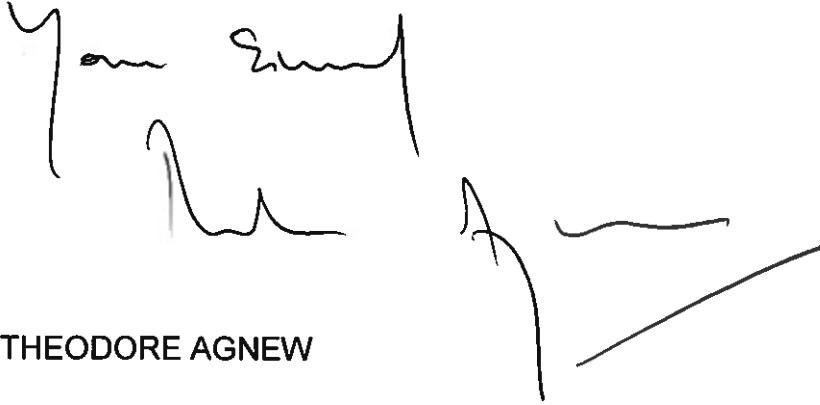
Historically, there has been evidence that some parents believe their children will be stigmatised if they apply for free school meals. However, as I mentioned in the debate, we know that this has reduced significantly because many schools use cashless systems and other methods to ensure that children who are eligible for free school meals are not identified separately.

School governing boards are responsible for how they organise their meal provision, and rightly they have a degree of freedom in how they do so. In what is likely a quite extreme example, differentiating the offer at lunchtime would be a backward step, and schools and school governors should challenge themselves if they think their delivery could risk the re-introduction of stigma as an issue. I know that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families takes this incredibly seriously, and he plans to write to schools to remind them of their legal duties around the provision of school food and free school meals, and to encourage them to ensure they do not limit the choice available to free school meal pupils. He also plans to provide a formal response to the recommendations in the Children's Future Food Inquiry report early in the 2019 autumn term.

Finally, if you have any specific concerns, or any examples of good practice that you would like to share, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families would welcome hearing about them. If you know of any parents who have concerns, as a first step we recommend raising these with the head teacher. If these remain, the matter can ultimately be raised with the Secretary of State for Education who can issue a direction to the school if necessary.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

I hope this answer has been useful; a copy will be placed in the libraries of both Houses.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theodore Agnew'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T' and a long, sweeping underline.

THEODORE AGNEW