

Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing St  
London  
SW1A 2AA



*Email: boris.johnson.mp@parliament.uk*

16 October 2020

Dear Prime Minister

I am writing to you as a matter of urgency to ask that the Government step in to provide funding for the provision of free school meals for this October half term and match the action the Co-op has taken today to provide funding for the 5,000 children reliant on free school meals in the Co-op's 25 academies.

We simply cannot let any child go hungry as a result of this pandemic. As the Chief Executive of a leading business with its roots in the North, I can see at first hand the acute challenges faced by vulnerable children and their families. The need faced is more serious for families now than it was in the summer - jobs have been lost and whatever savings families had have long gone. As a nation we must step in and provide support to the communities who most need it.

That is why the Co-op Group has given its support to Marcus Rashford's campaign and have become a leading member of his Child Food Poverty Taskforce. We support the three recommendations from the National Food Strategy at the heart of Marcus' campaign which provide a sustainable solution to child food poverty and have used our voice to endorse his petition.

However, with just days to go until the October half term there is an immediate and acute need so the Co-op has taken action. The Co-op will provide funding to support more than 5,000 vulnerable children at schools within the Co-op Academies Trust, this October half term. We will provide each of them with vouchers worth £20 – more than the £15 allocated in the summer because we believe it is, simply, the right thing to do.

This builds on the £2.6m the Co-op spent on supporting those children in the Co-op's academies who were reliant on Free School Meals during lockdown and extends our continuing commitment to provide vouchers for all pupil premium students forced to self-isolate since our academies re-opened, not just those who are eligible for free meals.

But there are more than 1.4 million children in England alone who are in desperate need of support this half term – the fact that the Co-op support can only reach 5,000 deeply concerns me. I urge you to reconsider the Government's position and ensure that this half term vulnerable families can afford to feed their children.

I am copying this letter to Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP and I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Murrells'.

**STEVE MURRELLS**  
**CEO, CO-OP GROUP**

Registered Office: Co-operative Group Limited  
1 Angel Square, Manchester, M60 0AG. Reg No 525R