

Scottish Free School Meals Campaign briefing in support of Amendments 192 and 201 to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill

The Scottish Free School Meals Campaign urges MSPs to vote in favour of **amendments 192 & 201** to the Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill, as lodged by Adam Ingram MSP.

The amendments would alter section 53 & 133 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, enabling Scottish Ministers to introduce regulations requiring local authorities to provide free school lunches to children “*in such yearly stage of primary or secondary education, or is of such other description as the Scottish Ministers may by regulations prescribe*”

In effect, the amendments would enable the Scottish Government to give legislative effect to its policy commitment to provide universal free school lunches to children in P1-P3.

The Scottish Free School Meals Campaign is delighted with the Scottish Government’s recent announcement that it will provide universal free school meals for all children in P1-P3ⁱ from January 2015. We are long standing supporters of the policy which we believe will help tackle the attainment gap and increase levels of nutrition, health, concentration and wellbeing amongst Scotland’s childrenⁱⁱ.

We therefore urge MSPs to support **amendments 192 & 201**, lodged by Adam Ingram MSP. The amendments will give the Scottish Government the power to introduce regulations requiring local authorities to provide free school lunches to children “*in such yearly stage of primary or secondary education, or is of such other description, as the Scottish Ministers may by regulations prescribe.*”

While we appreciate that the Scottish Government anticipates the support and co-operation of local authorities in rolling out universal free school lunches in P1-P3, there are strong benefits to creating clear legislative entitlement. These include the following:

- It will immediately relieve stress in hard pressed households by ensuring that parents are confident their children will be receiving a free healthy school lunch wherever they live. For example a family with two young children will be able to budget for up to an extra £685 from January 2015ⁱⁱⁱ.
- It will put eligibility for free school meals for P1-P3 on a similar legislative footing as existing entitlement to free school lunches. Eligibility for families in receipt of a range of social security benefits and tax credits is already laid down in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and subsequent regulations^{iv}.
- It will provide a means of holding local authorities to account if, for any reason, they fail to implement the Scottish Government’s policy commitment. This is necessary because, despite a commitment to provide a free healthy lunch to all P1 to P3 pupils being contained in the 2007 Concordat, the policy was not delivered.

Thus, as well as urging MSPs to vote in favour of **amendments 192 & 201**, we would also ask them to use their influence in the months to come to ensure that regulations are promptly introduced giving practical effect to this enabling power. Regulations guaranteeing universal free school lunches to P1-P3 should be introduced by January 2015 at the latest.

For more information please contact John Dickie, Head of CPAG in Scotland on 0141 611 7090 or by emailing jdickie@cpagcotland.org.uk



The Church of Scotland



Save the Children



The Educational Institute of Scotland



One Parent Families Scotland



ⁱ <http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Supporting-Scotland-s-families-81d.aspx>

ⁱⁱ See, for example, research carried out by the University of Essex; Take up of free school meals: Price effect and peer effect; July 2012 <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/publications/working-papers/iser/2012-12.pdf>; Institute of Fiscal Studies; Review of Educational Attainment and Free School Meal Take Up July 2012 http://www.ifs.org.uk/pr/fsm_260712.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Based on a family with two children in P1-P3, paying £1.80 each for a school lunch http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/855/schools-catering/418/food_in_schools

^{iv} Including, for example, the Education (School Meals) (Scotland) Regulations 2003, the Education (School Meals) (Scotland) Regulations 2009, the Education (School Lunches) Amendment Regulations 2013