

Annex B

**From Cllr David Simmonds, Chairman of the
LGA Children and Young People Board**

Rt. Hon David Laws MP
Minister of State for Schools
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

10 February 2014

Dear David

Free school meals

Apologies that I was unable to get to the Reference Group meeting as a result of the tube strike.

I understand that you had a discussion about the practicalities of introducing free school meals for infants in September and Helen Johnston passed on the concerns raised by some of our member councils about the adequacy of the capital allocation for adapting and installing school kitchens. This is a particular issue in areas that have dispensed with individual school kitchens and moved to an arrangement where a single 'hub' kitchen provides meals to a number of schools, a programme of works funded and guided by the previous administration.

Given that the free meals need to be available from the beginning of September, there is a substantial task ahead to tender for and build new kitchens where required, and to tender for and implement contracts with catering services. The legalities of procurement and the need to prepare the relevant infrastructure make this task extremely urgent, and clarity on this issue, and guidance to school forums and schools about how the capital monies provided by the Government should be used is vital as this will determine exactly what has to be provided. Just to use my own borough, Hillingdon, as an example, the money provided is sufficient to provide a couple of additional hot trolleys for each school, or could be used to provide greater capacity in 'hub' kitchens that could provide hot meals to a number of schools; but this assumes clarity about whether a hot meal is required, and for external caterers, the question of nutritional standards is key to price.

There are also issues about the way the capital has been allocated separately to maintained schools and academies. For example, in Somerset both academies and council-maintained schools provide 'hub' services to smaller rural schools. While councils may use their capital allocations to contribute to expanding the capacity of the kitchens in academies that provide meals to maintained schools, it does not appear to be possible for academies to contribute capital to improve the facilities in council-maintained schools when they use them to provide hot meals to pupils.

I am copying this letter to Phil Norrey from SOLACE and Andrew Webb from ADCS.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'D. Dinn', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.