



From the Parliamentary
Under Secretary of State
for Work and Pensions

Steve Webb MP
House of Commons

DWP Department for
Work and Pensions

Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9DA

Telephone
020 7340 4000

Email
ministers@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
www.dwp.gov.uk

Dear Steve,

I promised at the Commons consideration of Lords amendments to the Child Poverty Bill that I would follow up my answer to your question with a letter outlining what will be done to maximise the take-up of the extension to free school meal (FSM) eligibility.

First of all I should clarify the figures. The threshold from the 6 April 2010 is £16,190 and this figure is in line with the threshold applied to the maximum income on Child Tax Credit. This will increase each year to keep in line with inflation.

As I said at the time, I completely agree with your point that these changes will only have real worth if claimed by the people that they aim to benefit.

In my response I referred to "The Hub", now called the Electronic Checking Service (ECS), that the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), with other Government Departments, have developed. This system aims to reduce the burden on local authorities and schools making it much easier for them to find out if a child is eligible for FSM or not. Changes will be made to this service in order to reflect the extension to FSM eligibility for primary school children. Also work has started so that parents can directly access the ECS and check their child's eligibility.

In addition to this DCSF officials are working with Department of Work and Pensions and Job Centre Plus so that the changes FSM eligibility are worked into back to work discussions particularly with a change to the 'better off' calculations so that it will no longer be automatically included as an income deduction, as it current stands due to the lost of FSM eligibility, for those moving into work.

More widely the take-up of school meals is one of the indicators in the Child Health PSA and in the National Indicator Set and so increasing take-up is a priority for the Government. The School Food Trust support schools to improve take-up of school meals which will also include increasing the take-up of FSM.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the Library for the benefit of other members.

Thank you for your support for this amendment to the Child Poverty Bill.

Yours,

Helen

HELEN GOODMAN