



**Kent Children  
and Young People**

To All Headteachers

### **Urgent Action Required**

**David Adams**  
**Reconnect Programme Director**  
Sessions House  
County Hall  
Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1XQ

Phone: 03000 414989  
Ask for: David Adams  
Email: [david.adams@kent.gov.uk](mailto:david.adams@kent.gov.uk)

Date: 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Dear Colleague

### **Re: Support for low-income families**

Further to my letter of 9<sup>th</sup> November, I am writing to confirm three elements of support for disadvantaged families this Christmas, with two continuing next year. I need your help, please, to make this support available to your families. All three offers need you to issue vouchers to the families of your benefits related free school meals children using Wonde's evoucher system. Further details of how to do this are below. I recognise a few schools may need to issue supermarket vouchers via other systems and this issue is covered at the end of this letter.

### ***Free School Meal Provision for the Christmas, February, and Easter Breaks***

The Government has recently made a Household Support Grant available to local authorities, which will provide support to the most vulnerable families this winter. KCC Members have agreed to use this grant to fund supermarket vouchers for families eligible for benefits related free school meals for the Christmas, February Half-term, and Easter holidays. The agreed amount of funding is set at £15 per eligible child per week, therefore schools will need to allocate £30 per child for the Christmas holiday, £15 per child for the February half-term break and £30 per child for the Easter holidays. This applies regardless of schools' individual agreed term arrangements.

To ensure families have their vouchers in time for each holiday period, please order these two weeks in advance of the end of term for each break. I will write to you ahead of the February and Easter breaks to remind you. So initially, please proceed with issuing vouchers for the two-week Christmas period, preferably using the Wonde system (details below).

### ***Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme***

In his budget statement the Chancellor confirmed funding for the HAF programme to continue for the next three financial years. This is great news, giving certainty to the families of children who receive benefits-related free school meals, and to existing

and new HAF providers (including schools) who can now invest in the infrastructure to deliver HAF each Easter, Summer, and Christmas holiday period. This Christmas we have been able to fund HAF providers to take participating children on a trip, such as to the panto or an ice rink, with both the cost of entry and travel covered by the programme.

The other good news is that the DfE have agreed we can provide an exception to the grant conditions, so that children with a social worker who do not receive free school meals can also have a free HAF place this Christmas. We hope this is well received and will encourage a high take up of available places. We are working with our social work teams to promote this opportunity.

Following our work with Wonde last summer to develop Reconnect HAF and Leisure Centre vouchers, Wonde has developed a HAF system which is being marketed nationally. We have decided to use this system to enable eligible families to access their HAF entitlement and demonstrate their eligibility to providers. Therefore, I need you please to also issue your benefits related free school meals children with a HAF voucher via Wonde's system (details below).

### ***Free Family Bus Passes***

The Reconnect Programme is committed to helping children and young people reconnect with family this Christmas. KCC knows that household finances are being stretched for many families currently, so to help those most in need we have worked with Kent's bus companies again, who have kindly offered to provide free family travel during the Christmas holidays. These passes will be available to families of children who receive benefits related free school meals, and to those taking up Free for 2 nursery places. These can be used by either:

- one adult and up to three children, or
- two adults and up to two children.

The passes will be valid from Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> December until Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> January inclusive. Full terms and conditions are listed on the Reconnect website.

Please also launch bus passes to your eligible free school meals families. We will issue vouchers to the Free for 2 families.

### **Actions to take**

Please send the attached flyer to all eligible families to inform them of the offers and how they will access them. Then, please issue all three vouchers to your eligible free school meals families.

#### **1. You already use Wonde**

If you are already using Wonde, then you will just need to follow the same process to send out all three types of vouchers. For step-by-step guidance on issuing all three vouchers together, please see the attached instruction leaflet.

#### **2. You are not using Wonde**

I would encourage schools to use Wonde but recognise that some are tied into alternative solutions for supermarket vouchers. Those schools can continue to make their own arrangements and invoice us for the cost of the supermarket vouchers

issued to eligible families. Please can all invoices reach the Free School Meals team no later than the end of term for each break.

For the HAF voucher and bus pass, I will need you to use the Wonde system to distribute. Please contact [support@evouchers.com](mailto:support@evouchers.com) to be set up on the Wonde system and then follow steps 8-20 in the attached instruction leaflet.

If you have any questions about the above information or would like to speak to a member of the Programme Team, please email: [reconnect.kentcyp@kent.gov.uk](mailto:reconnect.kentcyp@kent.gov.uk)

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Adams', with a horizontal line underneath.

**David Adams**  
**Reconnect Programme Director**