Dear The Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP,

 Families across the country are experiencing a squeeze on their finances unlike anything we have seen in this country for decades and decades. It is no exaggeration to say that countless people are having to choose between heating and eating. For a country of the wealth of the United Kingdom, in 2022 that is an unacceptable choice for anyone to have to make, especially when there are children affected.

This is sadly the case in millions of households. Mixed with inadequate and underfunded food education, this crisis is spiralling wildly out of control - something has to change.

We believe that every child should be offered a nutritious school meal, alongside comprehensive education about where their food comes from, how to prepare it and the importance of sensibly sourcing produce which protects the environment and helps to boost the UK’s food security.

We understand that this is a considerable departure from the current policy, however big challenges require big solutions.

For far too many children, their school meal is the only proper meal they receive that day. Some are not even entitled to that - we have to significantly expand the eligibility for these meals.

Any cost that is incurred will easily pay for itself over the coming decades. We need to significantly invest in our young people today, with enormous benefits to be enjoyed tomorrow.

Children have a varied and rich curriculum, rightly so, but we want to see more effort and attention focused on practical skills such as cooking and preparing meals. Skills which would have enormous benefits in later life.

We have some of the highest levels of childhood obesity in the Western world. Why? Because eating an unhealthy and unbalanced diet is easier and often less complicated? Let’s give our children the tools to properly take care of their physical and mental health. This is primarily the responsibility of a child’s parent or guardian, but there is no reason why the education system cannot significantly add value to this development.

A healthier population brings many advantages, one of which would be to significantly reduce the pressure on the health service from a variety of preventable diseases. This won’t happen overnight, but a long-term strategy is required. IFS research has shown that free school meals boosted attainment, ‘at least’ in disadvantaged local authorities.

Quite simply, no child should be failing to reach their potential because of hunger.

And if we are serious about the ‘Levelling Up’ agenda, then school catering has to be included and given the priority it deserves. North and South, East and West - current geographical differences are stark and need to be addressed.

We also have to ensure that all funding designated for school caterers is delivered to school caterers. Currently the funding is £2.41 for each universal infant free school meal, and £2.47 for FSM but the majority of School meal caterers do not get that. Schools are not passing on the full funding and that has to change which is why we recommend that this money has to be ring-fenced.

These are all discussions which urgently need to take place, with real change rapidly following.

We look forward to your response,

Alexia Robinson & Jeanette Orrey MBE

Co-Chairs Love British Food Schools Working Group