

Co-op to fund school dinners if Coronavirus sends kids home

- 6500 Co-op Academy students to get food vouchers to replace free school meals so kids don't go hungry
- Call for government co-ordinated action to feed 1.4m school kids on free school meals across the country

The Co-op today announced that it will step in and provide lunch for all 6500 students who normally receive government funded free school meals at its 25 Co-op Academies, if they are required to close to help delay the spread of Coronavirus. Two Co-op Academy schools are closing tomorrow as students, families and staff self-isolate.

In a bid to make sure no child goes hungry the Co-op also called upon the government to lead a nationwide effort to help feed the 1.4 million students who receive free school meals across the UK.

Announcing the move Co-op Retail CEO, Jo Whitfield, said: "For many children who receive free school meals, lunch at school is the main meal of the day so if school closes unexpectedly they could go hungry. We don't think that's fair on our students or their families who often struggle to keep food on the table, and it has an impact on the health and wellbeing of vulnerable families.

"So, we're making sure the students attending our 25 Co-op Academies won't miss out, but we know this is a drop in the ocean when you consider there are 1.4 million kids on free school meals in this country. That's why today I'm also asking the Government to lead a nationwide effort to make sure no child goes hungry just because they can't go to school."

The Co-op will provide all students receiving free school meals at its 25 Co-op Academy schools, located in the North of England, with a £20 voucher to spend in Co-op food stores – enough to cover a one week unplanned closure. The free school meal provision is approx.. £2.70 per day.

The Co-op is also planning to launch a pilot summer holiday programme to help keep students on free school meals fed during the holiday period when families can struggle to cover the additional cost of feeding their children when they're not at school. Working with Kelloggs and Fareshare, Co-op food stores will divert food that is near its use by date to Co-op Academy schools, helping more families make ends meet over the holidays when school isn't providing free meals and ensuring kids continue to get a nutritious meal each day.