

# Russell George AM

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Gweinidog yr Wrthblaid dros yr Amgylchedd a Datblygu Cynaliadwy  
ac Aelod Cynulliad dros Sir Drefaldwyn

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Dear

## School Meals

I would just like to provide you with an update following the letter I circulated to school governing bodies a few weeks ago, regarding school meal provision within the Powys local authority area. This issue has clearly been a cause of concern for many schools across Montgomeryshire, as I have received a good number of responses from school governors.

Originally I was informed by Powys County Council that they had only received one complaint associated with its school meal provision policy. This related to the menu choice rather than the portion size. However, since I have raised this issue more widely, a number of schools have informed me they had also raised concerns regarding portion size directly with the Council over the past 12 months and had not received a response. This clearly contradicts the information I was originally provided by the local authority.

I have now collated and analysed all the responses I have received, which has provided me with some very useful information. Only one school that responded to my letter informed me that it was satisfied that the current policy on school meal provision, lead to its pupils being well fed and happy. The majority of schools that have responded said they did have concerns regarding the portion size, with many older children complaining that they remained hungry following their school meal.

A school near Newtown had also conducted its own survey on this issue, inviting parents to comment and provide their views to this issue; they supplied the results of that survey to me with their response. Of the parents who responded, the survey showed that - 67% considered the portion size too small; 93% would like their children to have seconds if they wish and 10% had stopped using the school meal service altogether, due to the inadequacy of the portion size.

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I have raised the issue with the Welsh Education Minister, Huw Lewis AM, during questions to the Minister in Plenary on 11<sup>th</sup> November. He responded by saying that 'common sense' was needed by local authorities when interpreting government guidelines on the size of primary school meal servings. The Minister agreed with me that decisions on the provision of school meals should be made at a local level by the individual primary school and not by central 'diktat' from the local authority. Mr Lewis also stated that he was satisfied there was enough flexibility in government guidance on meal servings, as it only provided a 'suggested portion size'.

I have now visited a number of schools since this issue has been raised with me and it is apparent that school canteen staff are very committed to their jobs. It is my view that the management within catering services at Powys County Council have poorly communicated how school meal provision through the '*Appetite for Life*' guidelines, should be implemented. I came to that conclusion because it was clear from both the responses I had received from schools and from the discussions I had personally with canteen staff, that there was a consistent perception that seconds should not be allowed and a standard portion size was to be served regardless of the age of the child.

Following my original letter to you, it now appears Powys Council catering officials have contacted school canteen staff across the county and informed them not only the provision of second servings can be offered but also that meal sizes should be made at the discretion of school staff.

I wish to thank all the schools that responded for their input and I hope that by raising this issue more publically, school canteen staff now have adequate support to provide a 'common sense' approach to serving meals in primary schools across the Montgomeryshire area.

Other schools have raised further specific points with me regarding school meal provision. I intend to respond to these schools on an individual basis.

Please feel free to contact me should you wish to discuss this matter further.

Kind regards

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