

Report of the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education

York Hungry Minds Project Update

Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to update the members of scrutiny on the implementation of the York Hungry Minds project. The members of scrutiny are asked to note the positive benefits of the pilot project, support the York Hungry Minds Project and to ask the Executive member to explore extending the project to two additional primary schools during 2025.

Background

2. In November 2023 the council's Executive agreed to implement a pilot project to extend Universal Free School Meals ("UFSM") to Key Stage 2 children. The project is designed to deliver on the Executive's election manifesto commitment to create a cross city alliance to address disadvantage and the cost-of-living crisis.
3. The pilot project has involved the implementation of an offer of universal free school lunches for KS2 children at Westfield Primary School and a whole school offer of free breakfasts at Burton Green Primary Academy. Both pilot projects began in January 2024.
4. The pilot projects have been supported by £100K of council funding and funding raised through the York Community Fund for the York Hungry Minds Project. This has included donations from The Persimmon Trust and The Sylvia and Colin Shepherd Charitable Trust.
5. The pilot project has focused on testing the delivery of UFSM in two contrasting schools. Westfield Primary is a large local authority maintained school and Burton Green Primary Academy is a smaller than average academy school. Both serve areas of the city with high percentages of children eligible for free school meals. At the outset the project has been designed as a test and learn project and this has been

achieved by choosing to focus on two methods of delivery and to look at two schools at different states of readiness with regards to their catering arrangements. The learning from the evaluations of the pilot projects is being used to inform the next stage of the implementation plan being developed by the York Hungry Minds Steering Group.

6. Both schools have reported positive benefits from being involved in the pilot projects and the evaluation reports provide quantitative and qualitative evidence about the impact of the pilot schemes. It is important to recognise that the interim evaluations have been completed at a relatively early stage in the project, however, a range of benefits are being identified even at this early stage.
7. The introduction of universal free school lunches to KS2 at Westfield has seen the take up of KS2 school lunches increase by 68.7% in the first two terms of the pilot (January to July). Over the first two terms of the pilot Burton Green has averaged 37 breakfast per day and served 3792 breakfasts between January and July.
8. At Westfield the costs of serving the additional meals over the period January to July has been £43,517.81. With a total cost of £4,090 for the breakfast offer at Burton Green over the same period of time. It is important to reflect on the scale of delivery in both schools as this accounts for the difference in costs. In both schools additional equipment has been needed and at Westfield additional catering staff have been needed. The circumstances of each school in the city varies in terms of number of pupils, costs of the delivery of school meals and the readiness of school kitchens and staffing to support the delivery of universal lunches or breakfasts. This has to be considered when scoping the scale up of the project to additional schools. An average cost of delivering the meals is difficult to generate as a result and will vary school by school.
9. The interim evaluation reports completed by researchers from the Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York (Annex A and B) provide rich data to evidence the impact of the pilots in both schools and both reports identify a range benefits from adopting a universal approach to school meals. There has been evidence of improved attendance and punctuality due to the school breakfast offer at Burton Green and both schools have seen evidence of improved behaviour as a result of children feeling less hungry.

10. Both projects are making an important contribution to tackling the impact of the cost-of-living crisis for families and the evidence from parent voice shows that the main concern is about the sustainability of the offer in the longer term.
11. Both interim evaluation reports conclude that the pilot is having a positive impact. The evidence from the report highlights the important role that the universal offer of free school meals makes towards supporting families on low incomes. The key concern highlighted in both reports is not about the rightness of the approach but about the longer-term sustainability of the offer. The pilot schools will continue to be supported until 2027 as this will provide security to the current project and will provide the opportunity to study and capture the impact of the project on educational outcomes over a longer period of time.
12. Further work is now taking place to extend the breakfast offer to two additional schools. This is being done in advance of the national pilot for primary school breakfast clubs. The rationale for this is that York has demonstrated the difference that a universal breakfast offer can make to children across a range of outcomes. The York Hungry Minds approach shows a commitment to a placed based initiative which has the potential to inform the development of future national policy.

Council Plan

13. The York Hungry Minds pilot project is delivering the Council's corporate priorities listed below:
 - a. **Health** – the delivery of the pilot project is ensuring that primary age children receive a healthy breakfast or school meal, contributing to public health priorities to reduce childhood obesity and improve dental health;
 - b. **Environment** – the delivery of the pilot project is being used to monitor the impact of food choices on reducing food waste and the assessment of school kitchens is being used to improve energy efficiency;
 - c. **Affordability** – the provision of universal free school meals has ensured that children have access to a good quality meal regardless of their ability to pay, and;

- d. **Human Rights and Equalities** – the pilot project has supported the human right to education and is addressing health inequalities through the provision of access to universal free school meals.

Recommendations

14. Members are asked to support the work of the York Hungry Minds Project and to ask that the Executive member for Children and Education continues to work with the steering group to expand to project to deliver breakfast at two additional schools during 2025.

Reason: The expansion of the universal breakfast offer will provide valuable support to low income families and ensure that more children are able to gain the benefits achieved in the pilot schools.

Contact Details

Author:
Maxine Squire
Assistant Director,
Education and Skills
01904 553007

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:
Martin Kelly
Corporate Director, Children and Education

**Report
Approved**



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For further information please contact the author of the report

Background papers

None.

Annexes

Annex A – FSM Pilot Interim Report, Eloise Tann, University of Leeds

Annex B - Interim Report UFSM Qualitative Findings, Aniela Wenham, Rebecca Kerr, Katherine Smith & John Hudson, University of York

Presentation: Documents to follow.

Abbreviations

UFSM – Universal Free School Meals.