



The York Policy Engine



York Hungry Minds Qualitative Evaluation Interim Findings

City of York Council
Children, Culture and Communities Scrutiny Committee
5th November 2024



Methodological Approach

- ❖ Westfield Primary Community School and Burton Green Primary School
- ❖ Qualitative focus
- ❖ Interviews (n=34)
- ❖ Staff including catering staff, pastoral staff, class teachers and school leadership at both schools were interviewed (n=21)
- ❖ Parents of pupils (n=13)
- ❖ Fieldwork dates: June - August 2024

Practical implementation

- ❖ **Rapid implementation** led to challenges around **communication strategy**, at times leading to a **gap in understanding and expectations**
- ❖ **Local press** attention has **politicised the policy**
- ❖ The rapid roll-out was possible due to **staff commitment**, relationships with **catering providers** and in ensuring there were adequate **kitchen resources**

“At first I kind of thought it was only for people who were on free school meals. **I didn't realise it was for everybody.**” (Burton Green School Parent)

“When we felt that it was unfairly reported in the press because it was taken out of context. I think that's been **a bit difficult that the press has released quite a few things before we've even been told about them.**” (Westfield School Staff)

“There's certain **members of staff that will help in the morning and take it in turns to run it.** So it just seems to have flown, like, worked really nicely with us as a team. I think, that's massively helped, I think, **because we all work together.**” (Burton Green School Staff)

Reaching children in poverty

- ❖ Staff acknowledged **the context of social inequalities**, many directly mentioning **poverty**, the scale of **cost of living** pressures and **economic insecurity**
- ❖ Staff and parents reflect that the **UFSM** scheme **helped ease financial pressures**.
- ❖ Interviewees highlighted **food insecurity** families face and the importance of the meals in **directly alleviating** pressure
- ❖ The **added reach of the universal model** over targeted approaches was emphasised in interviews

“..we have children coming in saying that **they're hungry, they've not had breakfast**” (Westfield School Staff)

“I would say the **biggest challenges** for our families and children are cost of living. **There's quite a lot of poverty around here** [...] the children are, in my opinion, more aware of it than they should be.” (Burton Green School Staff)

“...it's a **lot of weight off your mind** when you know that you're not having to pay for your child's school dinners and then that money can go towards food for the evening. Yeah” (Westfield School Parent)

“It's made a **big difference on finances** [...] you know, not having to sort of panic, thinking of what they're going to have in the morning” (Burton Green School Parent)

Reducing stigma

- ❖ **Universalism** was felt to **reduce or eliminate stigma** related to FSM
- ❖ Pupils were likely to **feel more comfortable to sit with their food** knowing that they are receiving the same food and portion size as their peers
- ❖ UFSM believed to have a **positive impact on school attendance** for some children
- ❖ Concerns that the **funding model** could be perceived as a **'charity model'**, and this may inadvertently stigmatise
- ❖ Only **two schools selected** for pilot - rolling out to more schools will go some way in reducing the stigma from being **'put under the spotlight'**

"They're sitting in the dining hall longer, because I **guess some children maybe felt a little bit uncomfortable** that they just had a really small pack up against somebody that's paying for a meal and getting a nice meal." (Westfield School Staff)

"I think for some of our parents... [UFSMs] **takes away some worry and concern and maybe a little bit of shame that you know we're struggling to feed our children** (Burton Green School Staff)

"**It's always difficult... that kind of media... commentary** about the place that you work in. And the community that you really care about [...] We want this support and we want this help. But you also, um, you want to celebrate what's positive about the area as well..." (Burton Green School Staff)

Tackling educational inequalities

- ❖ Strong view from staff and parents that UFSM **improved school attendance** especially at Burton Green School, where the timing of the breakfast club was observed to **promote improved punctuality and overall attendance**
- ❖ At Burton Green School, staff and parents noticed a **greater pupil readiness to learn**, whereby the breakfast club enabled pupils to start school well fed and in a positive mindset.
- ❖ Staff at both schools described the **positive impact of the UFSM policy upon improved behaviour in the classroom**

“It’s had an **enormous positive effect on attendance**. Yeah, the families that, you know, we struggle to get the children in on time or in regularly enough. It’s had a **massive impact**.” (Burton Green School Staff)

“They [were] still hungry by half past one, two o’clock. So that’s when **their behaviours are starting to do the peaks and troughs. We don’t see an awful lot of that anymore**, which is really nice. And the kids are coming out, you know, after eating, you can tell.” (Westfield School Staff)

“Instead of rocking up late for school because, X, Y, and Z’s happened, or they haven’t had a good breakfast, they are actually, **they’re 100 percent ready to face the day alongside their peers**.” (Burton Green School Parent)

Tackling educational inequalities

- ❖ Staff at both schools observed **improved pupil attainment** via the effects of reduced hunger on concentration as well as improved attendance and punctuality
- ❖ Tackling educational inequalities also intersects with **improved health and wellbeing among pupils**, with positive assessments of the **healthiness of food choices** from staff and parents, as well as observations of improved **physical and mental health**

“When you're halfway through a phonics lesson and they say, I'm hungry, when is it at lunch? It just ruins the flow of the learning, but there's none of that, so **they're all completely focused on what, what they're doing, what they're being taught**” (Burton Green School Staff)

“**If their bellies are full**, they're not thinking about something else and um, and you know they go out and they eat and they have that **down time of play** which is extremely **important for them mentally as well**” (Westfield School Parent)



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