
People Scrutiny Committee

3 December 2025

Report of the Executive member for Children and Education

An update on York Hungry Minds and the School Poverty Framework**Summary**

1. This report provides the members of scrutiny with an update on the work taking place York Hungry Minds project and on the development of the School Poverty Framework. The framework is designed to bring together a number of strands of activity which are being led by schools to address the impact of poverty on educational achievement. This work also supports the city's Child Poverty Strategy and recognises the importance of removing barriers to education as being crucial to the long-term improvement in outcomes.

Background

2. Members of scrutiny previously received an update on the York Hungry Minds project in November 2024. This report provides the members of scrutiny with the opportunity to learn from the findings of the full evaluation report provided by the Universities of York and Leeds. The members of scrutiny will be provided with an update on the development of the School Poverty Framework and the role York Hungry Minds plays in this as an innovative approach to better understanding and tackling the barriers to education faced by children experiencing poverty.
3. In February 2025, the number of schools delivering York Hungry Minds increased from 2 to 3. Westfield and Burton Green were joined by Fishergate Primary, who have been supported to deliver a free school breakfast. The benefits reported by the interim evaluation of the two pilot schools, in terms of improved attendance, better behaviour and readiness to learn are being seen at Fishergate Primary.

4. After a successful launch in 2024/25 York Hungry Minds is now in a position to implement the breakfast offer through more schools and a further six schools have completed expressions of interest to be included in the next round of the delivery of the free school breakfast scheme. The York Hungry Minds scheme is uniquely different from the National Breakfast Scheme and as a result provides added value to the city's children through providing them with a 'soft' start to the school day. The independent evaluation of the project by the Universities of York and Leeds also provides an important evidence base to demonstrate the range of improved outcomes that have been achieved through the breakfast offer.
5. As a result of the success of the implementation of the York Hungry Minds pilot a broader Schools Poverty Framework is being developed and implemented across the city. There are various strands of activity sitting under this work which is involving a range of partners including York Schools and Academies Board (YSAB) through their leadership of work on fair admissions and Huntington Research School and Children North- East who are leading on the implementation of the Poverty Proofing Schools Audits. City of York Council have made a further investment in this work through the secondment of a 0.5 full time equivalent School Poverty Officer from the Ebor Academy Trust to lead on the co-ordination of the work with schools on the implementation of the school poverty framework (see Annex A).
6. The role of the School Poverty Officer is to develop a school poverty framework that focuses on a continuum of actions that schools can use to remove barriers to education and promote belonging for those children that are experiencing poverty. These actions include but will not end with:
 - The Poverty Proofing Schools Audit – Working across 7 schools initially, the Poverty Proofing Schools audit is a process for schools to identify and remove financial and social barriers that prevent students from disadvantaged backgrounds from fully participating in school life. It involves reviewing policies and practices to ensure they don't create stigma or exclude students with fewer resources. The goal is to create a more equitable environment where every child can access all opportunities and ensure that all children feel that they belong in school.

- School attendance - Attendance support visits to schools now include poverty to be explicitly discussed as part of the meeting. The newly formed graduated response includes the requirement to complete an Early Help Assessment that will ensure that schools are looking at all the factors that may impact on a child's attendance, to include their financial situation, access to services and wider support networks.
 - Trauma informed response – Using the ARC framework, looking at the impact of trauma as a barrier to education and supporting professionals to understand both their own experiences of trauma as well as reactions to working with trauma, allowing for a workforce that feels confident in forming attachments that encourage a child's sense of belonging.
 - Mental Health – Supporting schools to understand the impact of poverty on a child's mental health. Training is being developed to support schools to have a mental health strategy/curriculum that allows teachers to feel supported with their individual approaches to teaching and learning but embed a collective approach and ethos around how we support children's mental health on a day to day, lesson to lesson basis. This will include a focus on understanding the impact of language, environment, whole school culture, and leadership on a child's sense of belonging.
7. York Hungry Minds has proved successful in demonstrating that tackling the impact of hunger has a positive impact on the attendance and engagement with learning. It also has an important role to play in helping all children to feel that they belong.

Council Plan

8. The York Hungry Minds project and the School Poverty Framework is delivering the Council's corporate priorities listed below:
- a. **Health** – the delivery of the York Hungry Minds 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 York Hungry Minds 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; promotion of reducing the costs of school uniforms and audits to poverty proof the school day are contributing to ensuring that children are able to engage fully in the life of their school regardless of their ability to pay and
- d. **Human Rights and Equalities** – the York Hungry Minds project has supported the human right to education and is addressing health inequalities through the provision of access to universal free school meals. The School Poverty Framework, which includes the poverty proofing audits, fair admissions charter and promotion of belonging is focused on reducing the barriers to education for children experiencing poverty.

Recommendations

- 9. Members of scrutiny are asked to support the work of the York Hungry Minds Project and the School Poverty Framework and to note the benefits of both to tackling child poverty in York.

Reason: The work described will provide valuable support to low income families and ensure that more children are able to have barriers to educational achievement removed so that their long term outcomes are improved.

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Report
Approved



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Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

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For further information please contact the author of the report

Annexes:

Annex A: School Poverty Framework and Plan

Annex B: Policy Brief; York Hungry Minds: Evaluating Universal Free School Meal Initiatives

Annex C: Presentation slides; York Universal Free School Meal Pilot: Quantitative Analysis

Annex D: Presentation slides; York Hungry Minds: Qualitative Evaluation Findings