

School Meals Scrutiny Review

Purpose of Report

1. This final report presents an update on the impact on schools in York of the introduction of universal infant free school meals (UIFSM) in September 2014.

Recommendations

2. Committee are recommended to note the contents of this report which provides an update on take-up and impact of UIFSM across York Primary schools.

Background

3. In June 2013, the Committee began its review of school meals; their agreed remit was to consider the take up of both school meals and free school meals across York schools. In January 2017 a final report was presented to the committee providing an update on the implementation of the recommendations that they had highlighted during their investigation.
4. During the period of the Committee's review of school meal take-up, the then coalition government introduced in September 2014 universal infant free school meals across the country. Although the committee signed off their final report in January 2017, they asked for one final report to be brought back to them in 2018. This report would enable them consider the impact on schools of the introduction of universal infant free school meals in key stage 1 (5 – 7 year olds) and whether it had improved take up in key stage 2 (8 – 11 year olds).

Position Prior to September 2014

5. Prior to September 2014 statistics were not collected either locally or nationally on school meal take up in primary schools on a regular basis.

However in the City of York, because we managed a central catering contract used by 40 primary schools we have been able to provide some comparisons of school meal take up both prior and post September 2014.

6. During the 2013/14 school year (last year before UIFSM) 36% of pupils across those 40 schools were on average taking a school meal each day. That equated to an estimated 3500 meals being served per day. These figures include both key stage 1 and key stage 2 pupils, as separate figures for each of the two key stages were not collected.

Introduction of Universal Infant Free School Meals

7. Central government provided some grant funding to Local Authority's prior to the introduction of UIFSM to support schools through the changes required. The City of York Council received £325k. This grant allowed the Local Authority, where required, to improve kitchen facilities, provide additional equipment and improve and modernise dining area facilities. All this was required in anticipation of the estimated increase in school meal take up particularly in key stage 1.
8. Because of the anticipated increase in school meal take up it also allowed for the potential for schools and Local Authorities to re-negotiate existing school meal catering contracts. The impact in York was that for those schools in the central contract the cost of key stage 2 meals were reduced from £2.25 to £2.00 per day.

Take-up of Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM)

9. During the 2014/15 school year, the first year of UIFSM 79% of pupils on average in key stage 1 had a school meal each day. During the same period 43% of key stage 2 pupils took a school meal each day. Across those 40 primary schools in the central contract that meant on average each day across both key stage 1 and 2 59% of pupils were taking a meal, equating to 5420 each day.
10. In the 2015/16 school year that figure went up to 60% (5451 meals). Key stage 1 take up dropped by 1% to 78% whilst key stage rose by 2% to 45%.
11. Partly due to academisation, but also because more schools wanted to choose their own school meals catering provider and negotiate their own contracts, the City of York Council made a decision in 2016 that from

July 2017 they would no longer manage a centrally provided school meals catering contract. Multi Academy Trust's and schools considered their future school meal catering options as a result of this decision. The result being that the number of school meal catering providers across York schools increased from 4 to 8 and an increase in the number of schools bringing their school meals catering services in-house.

12. Extensive support was provided to schools during the tendering and transition phases. As children are defined as a vulnerable group in food safety terms, it is critical that school meals have a robust "field-to-fork" chain of accountability that protects food safety, nutritional standards, quality and schools' reputations. The City of York Council therefore adapted its previous catering contract management service to offer schools a higher level of operational advice as well as performance monitoring. This has involved a focus on quality and whether the provision meets contractual and legislative demands, which requires working proactively but also preventatively to identify risks and unacceptable practices and provision.
13. The withdrawal of a central school meals contract has meant that it has become more difficult to monitor the uptake of schools meals. The only data now available to the Local Authority is information which is collected and collated on school census date. Data on school meal uptake is only taken twice a year, which means we can only compare data between one year and the next and does not give a full picture over the whole year.

Current Picture and Impact

14. The introduction of universal infant free school meals in key stage 1 has seen an increase in the number of pupils eating a school meal each day across York schools. Schools have had to adapt to accommodate increased school meal numbers. Although we are not aware of any school staggering their lunch breaks, some schools have increased numbers of midday supervisors to manage queues and flow through the dining room.
15. Take-up across the city's primary schools of UIFSM has remained consistent at around 78%-79% since its introduction in 2014. Whilst in key stage 2 there has been a small increase (3% - 5%) year-on-year in pupil take-up. It was anticipated that growth in take-up across key stage 2 may occur because of free meals in key stage 1. There are some positive signs across some York schools that this may be happening.

16. There is a range of selling prices for key stage 2 primary pupil meals varying in this current academic year from £2.00 to £2.48, most schools however have kept to the 2016/17 price which is £2.15. Price variations can be affected by the size of school, take up, what is provided by the contractor and each schools cost for providing the service. Variables include age and condition of kitchen equipment, condition of the kitchen premises, employers pension costs and other meals-related costs.
17. The impact of UIFSM on take up of school meals in key stage 2 will also be more difficult to assess as from the 31st March 2018 as there have been changes to eligibility for free school meals due to changes within the universal credit system. This is because protections have now been put in place meaning no child will lose their eligibility. All children entitled on 31 March 2018 will now be entitled until at least the 31st March 2022. Furthermore any child that becomes entitled after 31 March 2018 will also have this protection until the 31st March 2022. As schools and/or the Local Authority will not have to recheck eligibility because of these protections, it will not be until 2023 when data will be checked against eligible pupils in 2022, will there be any clear picture as to the impact of the changes in the legislation, and the impact on take up.
18. Changes to the assessment process do not allow comparisons to be made between primary school attainment and progression statistics pre the introduction of UIFSM and post. Attendance figures across primary schools in York have always been high compared to national figures. There has therefore been no major impact on primary school attendance data since the introduction of UIFSM with a 0.1% reduction between 2013/14, the year before UIFSM was introduced and 2016/17, the last full school year.
19. **Implications**
 - **Financial** – Paragraph 6 provides details of expenditure to support UIFSM introduction in York and paragraph 15 provides information on school meal prices.
 - **Human Resources (HR)** – There are no HR implications
 - **Equalities** - There are no equalities implications
 - **Legal** – There are no legal implications

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Scoping Report
Approved

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

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes: None

Abbreviations:

UIFSM - Universal Infant Free School Meals