



London Borough of Enfield

Report Title	Universal Primary Free School Meals
Report to	Children and Young Peoples Scrutiny
Date of Meeting	18 th December 2023
Cabinet Member	Councillor Abdullahi
Executive Director / Director	Tony Theodoulou – Executive Director Peoples Dept Peter Nathan – Director of Education
Report Author	Peter Nathan
Ward(s) affected	All
Classification	<i>Part 1 Public</i>
Reason for exemption	

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides information relating to the introduction of free school meals for all pupils of primary school age which has been introduced by the Mayor of London. This has been introduced for one school year only namely 2023/24 and covers all primary aged children in London although this report will consider its impact in Enfield.
2. Enfield borough will receive an overall funding allocation of £5,529,269 to distribute to primary schools in the borough the first tranche of which has already been paid out to schools. This has been allocated based on census data at the rate of £2:65p per meal per child which is higher than the rate received by schools from the DfE which is currently £2:53.
3. A higher rate of funding has been provided for the one Jewish school in the borough due to the specialist nature of Kosher food. This has been calculated at £3:50p meal per child and thus the school will receive an additional £45,420 to pay for these meals over the year.

Main Considerations for the Panel

4. Despite there being considerable logistical concerns about the introduction of this scheme, schools across Enfield have managed the process of a considerable number of extra children having school dinners very well. The information received from the mayor's office has been that there have been concerns raised in other London boroughs about the free school meals scheme. In Enfield though headteachers seem to have just gone on with the job of implementation with relatively little fuss and there has been no come back to the key officer responsible in Enfield.
All that have responded to a recent request for feedback have welcomed the scheme although there have been a range of consequences which are outlined below.
5. A request for feedback on the scheme (UFSM) were sent out by the Director of Education and some detailed responses were provided by 15 schools with further feedback provided at a borough-wide headteacher briefing. All headteachers welcomed the scheme with all schools seeing a welcome uptake in children having a hot meal which was the intention of the UFSM.
In one school the uptake of hot meals doubled from 300 a day to 600: in a further school the percentage has increased from 60% to 90% of pupils having a hot meal each day: in another school it has increased to 81% of pupils from 63%. It is expected the numbers will rise further with the onset of winter with some children moving away from packed lunches. It is intended to carry out a full survey with the support of the mayor's office later in the academic year to get a more detailed picture of uptake which will also give a broader view across London.
6. There have of course been consequences of having far more children having school dinners. There have been some additional cost issues for schools such as needing a lot more cutlery and plates for example. Most schools have also had to extend their dinner break times to allow for more children. This means for example having three sittings for lunch instead of two with lunch times starting at 11:30am and not finishing until after 1pm. In one school lunch now starts at 11:20am and it isn't concluded until 1:30pm. There is also a cost implication here too as dinner supervisors are needed to work additional time. At a time when school finances are stretched, this is an additional financial problem for schools not covered by the grant. On the more positive side though, it does mean that school office staff have less administration to do in terms of collecting school dinner money.
7. A further practical issues has been the impact on kitchen staff producing the meals. Some headteachers have commented on the complications and indeed the stress involved in having to provide such an increased number of meals for the children. Most of the catering companies however have been able to manage the increase successfully and it is likely that this is more of a process of embedding the UFSM system.
8. An issue raised by headteachers is concerning whether the UFSM scheme is only going to be for one year or whether it will be in place in future years. Parent expectations have of course been raised by the UFSM scheme. If it is to continue, there could be some capital implications in terms of school kitchen development as needed in some schools. The earlier that schools are

made aware of the plans for the future are, the easier it will be to plan moving forward.

Relevance to Council Plans and Strategies

9. This report is relevant to the key priority of “Thriving Children and Young People” as well as the key outcome that children should do well at all levels of learning.

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