



EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 3RD NOVEMBER 2015

SUBJECT: FREE SCHOOL MEALS

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the measures that are in place to promote applications for free school meals within the county borough in response to a request from a Member of Education for Life Scrutiny Committee.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 A child may be entitled to receive free school meals if their parent/carer is entitled to receive certain benefits. Accessing free school meals (FSM) also allows parents to receive a one-off clothing grant of £105 when the child is moving from primary school to secondary school. FSM numbers are collected by Welsh Government every January as part of the Pupil Level Annual Survey Census (PLASC) data collection process. The mechanism by which Welsh Government distributes Revenue Support Grant to each Council consists of more than 50 data sets, including FSM numbers, which determine each Council's funding allocation. Schools also receive a Pupil Deprivation Grant for each FSM pupil of £1050, rising to £1150 in 2016/17. Welsh Government use FSM numbers as a key indicator for deprivation throughout Wales and they are also a consideration in reporting on school performance.
- 2.2 A number of measures are in place to promote applications for FSM, which was enhanced following a review in 2014 in response to a fall in FSM numbers within the county as well as the rest of Wales. 511 additional claims were recorded in the January 2015 PLASC return; approximately 300 of which were in the 5 to 15 years age range, which are funded.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 The provision of free school meals is a statutory duty which contributes to the Healthier, Learning, and Prosperous themes of the single integrated plan, Caerphilly Delivers and also supports aims of the Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 This is an important benefit as parents who pay for their child to have school meals could save around £580 per year if they qualify for free school meals. Accessing free school meals also allows parents to receive a one-off clothing grant of £105 when the child is moving from primary school to their first year of secondary school. A child may be entitled to receive free school meals if their parent/carer is entitled to receive one of the following:

- Income Support
- Income Based Jobseekers Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Child Tax Credit, provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and their annual income does not exceed £16,190
- Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Working Tax Credit 'run-on' - the payment someone may receive for a further four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit.

School Clerks complete the PLASC returns, the details of which are sent to Welsh Government. Training of School Clerks is undertaken on an annual basis to ensure that they are fully aware of their role in the process and ensuring the information they input is correctly recorded. All PLASC data is checked within the Planning and Strategy Division in Education.

- 4.3 FSM numbers are collected by Welsh Government every January as part of the Pupil Level Annual Survey Census (PLASC) data collection process. The Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) is a mechanism by which Welsh Government distribute Revenue Support Grant to each Council. It consists of more than 50 data sets, including FSM numbers, which determine each Council's funding allocation according to its needs. It is important to note that the overall size of the settlement in Wales would not change, but the relative position of one authority to another may.
- 4.4 Schools receive a Pupil Deprivation Grant for each FSM pupil of £1150 for 2016/17. Welsh Government use FSM as a key indicator for deprivation throughout Wales. The 2015 school census data shows that, of Local Authorities in Wales, Caerphilly cbc has the 4th highest number (21.41%) of FSM pupils as a percentage of school population.
- 4.5 The percentage of pupils for FSM is a factor in reporting school performance. Primary schools are arranged into 5 groups according to the percentage of FSM pupils:
- | | |
|-----------|---------|
| 0% - 8% | group 1 |
| >8% - 16% | group 2 |
| >16%- 24% | group 3 |
| >24%- 32% | group 4 |
| >32% | group 5 |
- 4.6 Schools within group 5 have lower thresholds under which they achieve the differing quartile performance e.g. at KS2 a school in group 1 would have to achieve 100% for the Core Subject Indicator (CSI) to gain quartile 1 whereas a school in group 5 would have to achieve only 87.5% to gain quartile 1 position. Schools are therefore compared against schools of a similar type.
- 4.7 Within the All Wales Core Data Set (AWCDS) schools are further subdivided into groups of 10 or 11 schools according to their size and delivery language plus the following:
- 50% x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age eligible for free school meals,
 - 30% x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age who live in an area classed as in the 20% most deprived parts of Wales using the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD),
 - 10% x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age subject to school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs (SEN), plus
 - 10% x the proportion of pupils of statutory school age who are either new to the English language (or Welsh where relevant), at an early acquisition stage or developing competence.

- 4.8 Comparisons in performance are made against the other schools within this “family” and national and Local Authority averages. These family groupings are fixed for three years. Changes are then made based upon primarily movement in FSM. It is in the interests of schools to ensure that pupils who are entitled to FSM take up the entitlement so that comparisons are made as closely as possible to schools with similar characteristics.
- 4.9 Applications for FSM are administered by Catering Services. Promotion of FSM consists of providing leaflets and flyers in Libraries, Doctors’ surgeries, Leisure Centres and Schools, using social media, promotion on websites such as www.myschoollunch.co.uk/caerphilly, texting parents, attending school events including parent’s evenings, other promotional events, school assemblies etc. 108 promotional visits were undertaken to our school sites in 2014/15.
- 4.10 All letters sent to parents offering admission to schools by the School Admission Team are accompanied by a FSM application form outlining the eligibility criteria. The Secondary School offer letter sent to parents whose child is starting secondary school also includes information regarding FSM eligibility and offers automatic entitlement to the School Uniform Grant – (current value £105). The School Transfer Application Form also includes a FSM application form. 70% of applications to the Benefits Section are made on line and the remainder hard copy. There is an online link from the Benefits application to the free school meal web page and a free school meal application form is sent out with Benefits forms in the post.
- 4.11 The 2014 January PLASC highlighted that the total number of eligible FSM pupils had fallen throughout Wales. All but three of the twenty-two Authorities had experienced reductions in their numbers. Numbers of FSM claimants in Caerphilly reduced by 527 – from 6054 to 5527. A detailed review undertaken due to the fall in FSM numbers within the County was unable to identify a specific underlying cause for the reduction.
- 4.12 A communication plan was implemented in 2014 to promote applications for Free School Meals, this included additional media releases and visits to schools. A briefing note was issued to Council staff and to partners, particularly Health. Targeted briefings also took place with specific staff groups. The information issued to staff highlighted the benefits to families and schools of eligible parents/carers completing FSM applications. Work was also undertaken with the Parent Network. A template letter was provided to Headteachers for them to issue directly to parents/carers of their children with the opportunity for them to highlight the use of Pupil Deprivation Grant within their school.
- 4.13 An exercise was also undertaken within the Benefits Section to identify clients who may be eligible for FSM, but were not currently claiming. This resulted in the Benefits Section writing to 312 families, inviting them to apply for this benefit as they had not already done so.
- 4.14 Overall there were 511 additional claims recorded in the January 2015 PLASC return following implementation of this campaign in 2014; approximately 300 of which were in the 5 to 15 years age range for which we are funded. This equates to additional Pupil Deprivation Grant funding of circa £345,000 for schools within the county borough. The campaign is being repeated during 2015.
- 4.15 A presentation will follow by Christopher Parry, Headteacher Lewis Pengam, on the effects of deprivation and the strategies being deployed by the school.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct Equalities implications arising from this report, however it should be noted that children and young people, who fall under one or more of the protected characteristics, benefit to a greater extent from being able to access FSM, due to the links between eating properly and healthily and educational achievement, which can be a significant and specific issue for them.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report, which is for information purposes. As indicated above, free school meal entitlement is a financial benefit to claimants. In addition an element of the Council's Revenue Support Grant (RSG) settlement is derived from the number of pupils eligible for FSM.
- 6.2 For each FSM pupil, schools will receive a Pupil Deprivation Grant allocation of £1050, rising to £1150 in 2016/17. The increase in the number of FSM pupils following the implementation of the promotional campaign in 2014 equates to additional funding of circa £315,000 for schools within the county borough.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no personnel implications arising from this report.

8. CONSULTATIONS

- 8.1 The report has been sent to the consultees listed below and all comments received are reflected in the body of the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 Scrutiny Committee Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To inform the Committee of the measures that are in place to promote applications for free school meals within the county borough.
- 10.2 To respond to a request from a Member of Education for Life Scrutiny Committee.

11. STATUTORY POWER

- 11.1 The Education Act 1996.

Author: Rob Hartshorn, Head of Public Protection

Consultees: Councillor Nigel George, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services
Dave Street, Corporate Director, Social Services
Keri Cole, Chief Education Officer
Bleddyn Hopkins, Assistant Director
Sue Richards, Principal Finance Officer
Marcia Lewis, Principal Officer Catering
Clare Rogers, Principal Business Performance Manager
Amanda Main, Acting Benefit Manager
Nichola Paget, Appeals & Training Officer – Housing Benefits
Andrea West, School Admissions & Exclusions Manager
Margaret Hutcheon, AS/400 Analyst/Programmer
Leigh Butler, Principal Information Officer
Mike Eedy, Finance Manager
Trish Reardon, Employee Service Centre Manager
David Thomas, Senior Policy Officer (Equalities & Welsh Language)

Background Papers:

None

Appendices:

Appendix A