

REGULATORY AND OTHER COMMITTEE REPORT

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| NAME OF COMMITTEE: | Schools' Forum |
| DATE OF MEETING: | 23 January 2013 |
| SUBJECT: | Increasing the rate of pupils claiming free school meals |
| REPORT BY: | Tony Warnock Head of Finance (Children's and Specialist Services) |
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| IS REPORT CONFIDENTIAL? | No |
| IS REPORT EXEMPT? | No |

SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to share with the Schools' Forum the findings from a recent DfE' research report in to pupils not claiming free school meals and to explore opportunities for increasing the uptake across all schools and academies.

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In November 2012, the DfE published a research report entitled 'Pupils not claiming free school meals'. A copy is available at:

The main objective of the report was to present estimates of the numbers and proportions of pupils who are entitled to receive free school meals (FSM) but are not claiming. This report used new analysis from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Tax Credits and Benefits data alongside information from the DfE's School Census.

Key points

The key points to note include:

- Approximately 14% of pupils entitled to FSM are not claiming them. Around 1.4 million (21%) of children aged 4-15 in England are entitled to receive FSM but only 1.2 million (18%) of 4-15 year old pupils in maintained schools are registered to claim them. This suggests that c.200,000 pupils (or 3% of all pupils aged 4-15) appear to be entitled but are not claiming FSM.
- There are regional variations. In the South East and East of England, c.25% of entitled pupils are not claiming FSM, whilst in the North East, the figure is only 2%.
- At Local Authority (LA) level, under-registration rates range between 0% and 33%. Lincolnshire is estimated to be towards the top end of the range at 27%. Most LAs have between 10% and 20% of entitled pupils not claiming. There are 6 LA's with more than 30% and 16 that apparently have zero under-registration. These figures are derived by comparing HMRC data disaggregated at local level, to data from the schools census. It appears that LAs with a lower proportion of entitled pupils have, on average, lower registration rates.
- The proportion of pupils entitled to FSM decreases with age: 24% of 5 years olds are entitled, compared to 18% of 15 year olds.
- The proportion not claiming FSM is the same for both primary and secondary schools.
- Pupils with the following characteristics have lower likelihoods of claiming FSM:
 - pupils living in a less deprived area
 - pupils attending schools with a lower FSM rate
 - pupils from families with higher status occupations (i.e. professional)
 - pupils living in a family with higher parental qualifications
 - pupils of Chinese ethnic origin.
- Conversely, the following are more likely to claim FSM:
 - pupils with EAL or SEN
 - pupils in larger families with younger siblings.
- Families entitled to FSM whilst in some part-time work are less likely to claim FSM than those on out-of-work benefits.
- FSM claiming rates vary over time and are partly linked to the economy. There has therefore been a rise in claim rates in the last few years.
- On average, 20% of the pupils registered for FSM come off FSM within the year and are replaced by a similar number of new pupils claiming FSM.
- Approximately 25% of pupils aged 15 claiming f.s.m. in 2009/10 stayed on in school sixth forms, but 20% of those did not continue to claim FSM at age 16.
- Typically, 17% of pupils registered to claim FSM did not take the meal on any given day.
- There is a pattern between entitlement to FSM and under-registration rates. The three regions with the highest proportion of entitled pupils not claiming FSM are amongst those with the lowest proportion of all pupils entitled to FSM. It suggests that families living in areas with low overall entitlement rates are less likely to claim FSM.
- The following comparison highlights a major concern:

| LA | % of pupils entitled to FSM | Under-registration rate |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Lincolnshire | 17% | 27% |
| Derbyshire | 18% | 18% |
| Norfolk | 18% | 17% |
| Nottinghamshire | 18% | 19% |
| East Midlands | 19% | 17% |
| England | 21% | 14% |

Lincolnshire's under-registration therefore seems to be considerably out of line with similar nearby LAs, and indeed with the regional and national average.

- The financial impact to the county of the 4,000 pupils estimated not to be claiming FSM is considerable and will grow. The pupil premium is currently £623 per pupil, so this equates to a c.£2.5m loss in funding. With the pupil premium set to increase next year to £900 per pupil and possibly £1,200 per pupil the year after, that sum could rise to £3.6m and £4.8m in 2013/14 and 2014/15 respectively.

Possible ways forward

Clearly, there are significant financial, welfare and health benefits to be derived from reducing the level of under-registration in the county and increasing uptake of free school meals. Whilst this report focused on financial benefits (due to the scope of the Schools Forum's role), the positive impacts of pupils having a hot and nutritious school meal on their health, welfare and educational attainment cannot be underestimated and there is significant evidence which illustrates this. Increasing uptake also has a positive impact on helping to reduce child poverty through maximizing the benefits families take up.

It is essential that schools, academies, communities and the Council works in partnership to increase uptake which will maximise income for families and education providers.

Ideas for helping to address this include:

- Raising the awareness of interested parties including: headteachers, teachers and other school staff, governors, parents and pupils, to the findings in this report. Numerous existing channels of communication could be utilised.
- Exploring opportunities for innovative incentives at school level.
- Exploring opportunities for wider media awareness.
- Seeking to identify the reasons for under-registration that are particularly relevant to families and pupils in Lincolnshire, so that appropriate solutions can be identified.
- Asking the DfE for more localised data so that effort can be targeted to those areas of the county that have the greatest under-registration.
- Contacting county schools to compile and then share a list of positive actions that have already been proven to be successful in the past at reducing under-registration.
- Exploring opportunities for families to register their eligibility through alternative channels.
- Contacting LAs with similar characteristics to identify any successful strategies that they and their schools may have developed that could be implemented in Lincolnshire.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Schools' Forum is asked to:

- a. note the content of this report; and

- b. comment on how the number of pupils in Lincolnshire entitled to FSM but not claiming them might be reduced.

APPENDICES (If applicable) - these are listed below and attached at the back of the report.
None

| BACKGROUND PAPERS | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PAPER TYPE | TITLE | DATE | ACCESSIBILITY |
| DfE report | Pupils not claiming free school meals | November 2012 | https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/SchoolsSO/Page1/DFE-RR235 |