



Briefing 14/01

January 2014

Scottish Government free school meals P1-P3 pupils

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in Scotland

For information only to England, Northern Ireland and Wales

Key Issues

- All Scottish P1-P3 pupils will receive free school meals from January 2015.
- This announcement will affect 165,000 children, improving health and well being and saving families' at least £330 a year for each child.
- This move matches a plan being introduced in England this September.
- Summary findings from the 2007/08 free school meal trials which ran in 5 Scottish local authorities

1.0 Introduction

On 7 January 2014, the Scottish Government's First Minister Alex Salmond announced all Scottish P1-P3 pupils will receive free school meals from January 2015. This was announced as part of a £114 million package for young children over the age of two and will look to provide savings of at least £330 per child per year for families. APSE's Performance Networks collects a wide range of data from Scottish local authority education catering services. Information collected in the year 12/13 from participating local authorities confirmed the average cost of a primary school meal (infant p1-p3) in Scotland to be £1.81.

The money for this has been made available from the Barnett consequentials as a result September 2013 announcement from the UK Government which confirmed that it would fund universal free school meals from September 2014, for infant pupils, pledging in excess of £600 million per year.

2.0 Scottish free school meal trial October 2007 to June 2008 findings

Trials on the effect of free school meals have been explored in Scotland previously. In October 2007 to June 2008 as part of Scottish Governments ongoing drive to improve the health of the

nation, five local authorities took part in a free school meal trial. The five local authorities involved were:-

- East Ayrshire Council
- Fife Council
- Glasgow City Council
- Scottish Borders Council
- West Dunbartonshire Council

These local authorities were selected as part of the trial because they included recognised areas of deprivation, covered urban areas as well as small towns and rural areas across different parts of the country.

The trial resulted in significantly increased uptake in school meals, uptake increased from 41% to 69% within the target group of P1-P3 pupils not already free school meal registered and from 89.2% to 93.6% within the target group of P1-P3 pupils who were previously registered. In total, the uptake among all P1-P3 pupils increased from just over half to three quarters of pupils (53% to 75%).

The findings also highlighted that among P1-P3 pupils who were not free school meal registered and who did not take a school meal before the trial, those in the most deprived areas and those in the least deprived areas were equally likely to take up the offer of a free school meal. Providing evidence that uptake was not affected by the area in which the child lived.

The trial also found that the increase in uptake was higher in smaller schools and in schools with onsite (as opposed to off-site) cooking facilities.

Other findings from the trial included:-

- Parents indicated that if school meals were no longer free, their child would take a school meal more frequently than pre-trial.
- One of the main reasons for non-uptake was that some children are “fussy eaters”. Generally parents of such children want them to have school meals and would welcome help to encourage their children to eat a broader range of foods.
- Parents generally found it valuable to have menus sent home but with some child friendly meal names, it could be difficult to decipher individual ingredients within some dishes.
- A range of successful strategies to help make efficient use of time and space.
- A longer lead in time and coinciding with the start of the school year would be beneficial.
- The quality and quantity of food didn’t appear to change although some popular choices did sometimes run out for those at the end of the queue. This was however, a problem pre-trial and the problem did not increase as a result of the trial.
- The provision for special dietary needs was not a problem and there was no evidence of increased demand for special foods as a result of the trial.

The full findings from the trial can be found [here](#) Also see [APSE Briefing 13-46](#)

3.0 APSE Comment

APSE welcomes the announcement of free school meals and believes any effort to improve the diet of children is important. Ensuring that children have a healthy and varied diet during

their school years may see a change for the better in their health, overall wellbeing and future. APSE views investment in school meals at an early age as an important tool in the fight against obesity related illness, this is one of the best long term invest to save schemes available for the public purse. Money invested in healthy eating today saving huge sums from the health budget of the future.

This announcement builds on current arrangements in Scotland, which has already seen free school meals made available to primary children where parents receive child or working tax credits.

Since the free school meal trial in 2007/08 a huge amount of innovative and positive work has been completed by local authorities to help to minimise the potential issues outlined within the research. Many local authorities have changed the whole catering experience for children within their schools and the parents. For example Tayside Contracts now have an [interactive school menu](#) which makes choosing school meals more fun for the children as well as providing all of the nutritional information for the parents. Other examples include Renfrewshire Council's primary school "Grab and Go" and "Dine in Day" initiatives, East Renfrewshire Councils "restaurant style dining" for P1s, as well as North and East Ayrshire Councils achieving the Gold award for the Food for Life catering mark. Many local authorities have also already moved to cashless systems and some provide a pre-ordering service.

APSE is also encouraged by the new Scottish Government initiative (to be launched in March), which follows on from the successful Hungry for Success initiative and is intended to place school meals in a new and more significant context for local authorities in the curriculum. APSE hopes that this will provide local authorities with further support to continue to develop and innovate within this important service.

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