

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY REPORT

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

13 February 2023

FREE SCHOOL MEALS FOR NURSERY AGED PUPILS IN MIDDLESBROUGH

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Summary

To provide the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel with an overview of a proposal to provide free school meals to all 3 and 4 year old children attending a maintained nursery provision in Middlesbrough.

Introduction

1. In 2011 the pupil premium was introduced to provide additional funding for local authority maintained schools in England to increase the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers. Children eligible for free school meals also attract pupil premium for their school. The funding is paid directly to the school as they are best placed to determine what additional provision is needed.
2. From September 2014 Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) was introduced for all children in reception class through to the end of year two to receive free school meals.
3. The Government recognises the benefits of providing a healthy school meal to the most disadvantaged pupils. The Education Act 1996 requires maintained schools and academies (including free schools) to provide free school meals to disadvantaged pupils who are aged between 5 and 16 years old.
4. The government guidance, providing free school meals to families with no recourse to public funds (NRPF).

Evidence/Discussion

5. Middlesbrough Council acknowledges that Britain is in the midst of a cost of living crisis that is affecting households right across our borough. Concerns have been raised about the impact on low income families with school aged children.
6. The North East Child Poverty Commission showed that 41.2% of children in Middlesbrough are currently living in poverty. Children living in poverty are more likely to emerge from school with substantially lower levels of educational attainment.
7. The Council notes that at this time only pupils in reception and KS1 are entitled to Free School Meals in Middlesbrough. Given the cost of living crisis, this Council is deeply concerned that Nursery children in our maintained schools and nurseries are excluded from this offer. Therefore, believes that ensuring the youngest students are included in our Free School Meal offer is a critical tool to achieving those goals
8. In 2021-22 the percentage take up of free school meals aged 5 and over was 35.7% compared to 20.8% nationally. In 2021-22, take up increased by 2.5% in Middlesbrough to be 38.2% and 2.3% to 22.5% nationally.
9. Consideration has been given in order to look into the issues and costs associated with an extension of Middlesbrough's Free School meal offer to include all 3 and 4 year olds in maintained nursery and primary schools in the Borough.
10. To note, there are approximately 2000 pupils in each cohort (age group).
 - 419 nursery children attend a maintained setting for 15 hours per week
 - 570 nursery children attend a private, voluntary or independent (PVI) or childminder for 15 hours per week
 - 2,362 nursery children attend an academy school setting for 15 hours per week
 - 49 children attend maintained setting for 30 hours per week
 - 314 attend a private, voluntary or independent (PVI) or childminder for 30 hours per week
 - 262 nursery children attend an academy school setting for 30 hours per week

11. In order to calculate cost, the formula of the total number of academic days, 190 has been multiplied by the cost of providing free school meals , £2.30 per day is multiplied by the size of the cohort:

The cost of number of academic days per year = 190

Daily charge for free school meals = £2.30

Total number of pupils = 4,000 (2000 per age group)

12. Three key lines of enquiry have been explored and outlined as examples below:

Example 1:

Extending free school meal provision to ALL 3 & 4 year olds would be a cost to the Council of £1, 748,000.

This is calculated from:

The daily cost of free school meals of £2.30 multiplied by the number of academic days (190) to give the price per head of £437 per head annually.

3 year olds: (190 academic day x £2.30) x 2000 =£874, 000

4 year olds: (190 academic day x £2.30) x 2000 =£874, 000

In the first year, the total cost of free school meals for the 3 & 4 year old cohort would be £1,748,000

Example 2:

Extending free school meal provision to 3 and 4 year old attending a maintained for both 15 and 30 hours of nursery provision would be a cost of:

Total number of pupils: 462

FSM daily cost: £2.30

Number of academic days: 190

(190 academic days x £2.30) x 462 = £201,894

In the first year, the total cost of providing free school meals for the 3 & 4 year old cohort attending maintained settings would be £201,894

Example 3:

Extending free school provision to 3 and 4 year old attending 30 hours and remain in the setting over a lunch time period at a maintained nursery provision would be a cost of:

Total number of pupils: 49

FSM daily cost:£2.30

Number of academic days: 190

$(190 \text{ academic days} \times £2.30) \times 49 = £21,413$

In the first year, the total cost of providing free school meals for the 3 & 4 year old cohort attending maintained settings for 30 hours would be £21,413

Conclusion

13. The calculation above refers to all 3 and 4 year old pupils. However, the motion stipulates FSM for 3 and 4 year old pupils in maintained provision only. If consideration was not afforded to all 3 and 4 year olds discrimination could be challenged; fallout within the Private and Voluntary PVI, childminder and academy sector being precluded and vulnerable to fall in roll exercised through parental choice.
14. The calculation above refers to all 3 and 4 year old pupils. However, does the motion included all pupils within this age group or only those children who are deemed eligible in-line with the free school criteria?
15. If the motion stipulates FSM provision for those pupils attending a maintained provision, 3,538 children will not qualify as these children either attend a PVI, childminder or academy setting.
16. Children who access 15 hours only do not stay in the provision for lunchtime periods meaning that 413 pupils attending a maintain setting but only for a morning or afternoon session will not benefit from the FSM provision. Therefore, does the motion need to consider if a system is to be implemented to support these children at home?