

TACKLING FOOD POVERTY IN EDUCATION

Commission Report
and Recommendations
July 2023



FOREWORD

Foreword by Philip Glanville, Mayor of Hackney and Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care

Hackney has, in recent years, had much to celebrate. Our young and diverse population continues to grow, employment is rising, the performance of our schools, colleges and education settings continues to excel, and our school children continue to achieve record-breaking exam results and educational outcomes. The globally recognised success of the work of Hackney's education settings continues to change and shape lives for the better. 10 years on we have reflected on the educational success of the borough, but we know that there is still a lot to do to be a world class educational offer, which we know is within our reach.

Despite these positive developments, we are acutely aware that for a significant number of our fellow residents in some parts of our community, Hackney remains one of the most deprived areas of the country. For some in our community the problems are severe, with some facing even greater levels of poverty and inequality, and barriers that prevent them from fulfilling their potential.

No child should ever go hungry. But tragically, in Britain - one of the world's richest countries - millions do, every single day. It's a national outrage and perhaps the strongest symptom of a country at breaking point. That's why we are absolutely delighted that the Mayor of London will fund universal free school meals for all primary school children in the capital for one academic year from September.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan's, recent announcement to fund free school meals for all primary-age children across the capital this coming year is welcome news for Hackney. An estimated 40 percent of children live in poverty in our borough and we know there are thousands more local families struggling to eat and heat their homes during the deepening cost of living crisis. Eating cannot be a choice, and eating well should not be a choice, especially when new research shows that when children are fed well, their life chances grow. By investing in feeding our children with the best possible foods, we are literally fueling the future.

We want our children to grow up in the best place possible. This includes ensuring that all children have their rights respected and upheld. Under Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to healthy food. It is important in a fair and equal society that all children have access to the healthy, nutritious food they need to grow, learn, and play. We know that families on low incomes can find it harder to provide the kind of healthy food that they want for their children because of limited household budgets. This can mean having access to fewer options for buying and preparing food and facing higher costs as a result. Access to free school meals supports many families and helps unlock opportunities for children. Despite this, not every child who is entitled to a free school meal gets one. There can be a range of reasons for this, for example, family immigration status (though in Hackney we do fund free school meals for families with no recourse to public funds), or families may not be aware they can qualify for free school meals, and unfortunately, in some instances, there can still be stigma attached to getting a free school meal.

We understand the importance of providing our residents with targeted support in areas such as this; that's why Hackney joined other local authorities in successfully campaigning for poverty-related funding from the government. That brought £5.6m into Hackney over the last year - and will bring the same in for next year. This has helped us reach those most affected by poverty, including supporting low-income families of more than 20,000 children with help to buy food during the school holidays. This national funding injection is on top of more than £4m the Council is investing in reducing poverty and in direct financial assistance to the borough's households most in need.

Feeding our borough, and especially our children with affordable, healthy and sustainable meals has long been a priority for Hackney Council, and this one-year funding from the Mayor of London will give us welcome space to look at how we can ensure we do that while finding long-term and lasting solutions to food poverty. We recognised this when, earlier in the year, the Council passed the 'Right to Food Motion' and our Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission looked into this issue. In the motion, we pledged to campaign for protection from food poverty to be adopted at the national level and called on the Government to be held formally accountable for violations. As part of that drive, we want to see a national network of community-use kitchens, access to public land suitable for community food growing, as well as a country-wide policy of universal free school meals. In the meantime, and in the absence of direct government support, we know the Council has a part to play. This year, we are setting aside a further £250k to help reduce poverty, including to develop long-term access to affordable food, to end hunger in Hackney, and ensure there is emergency support when needed, while also promoting access to good, nutritious food.

In the autumn of 2022, we established the Tackling Food Poverty in Education task force, aimed at providing a hot, healthy, more sustainable meal to as many children in poverty as possible. The key objectives of the taskforce was to explore scope for the local school meals system to be able to provide more affordable, nutritious meals and also more sustainable meals underpinned by principles such as shopping local and as much as you can. The aims of the task group are available in the terms of reference for the programme which is available [here](#).

We have backed this programme with a £300k investment. This report describes some of the excellent practice in Hackney Schools and the learning from neighbouring local authority areas with a focus on providing access to universal free school meals and also highly nutritional meals for our children and young people. The report makes a number of recommendations for the Council, along with schools and education settings looking to increase their free school meal uptake, in addition to improving the quality and range of meals available to Hackney's learners.

We have some amazing examples in Hackney of schools already working with us on this, including investing in kitchen staff, and we will continue partnering with them and organisations like [Chefs in Schools](#) and [Bite Back 2030](#). This longer-term thinking will help us ensure that if the Mayor of London's funding stops, affordable and nutritious school meals do not. Our focus is about edging out low-quality meals sometimes produced by more profit-focused private companies and instead getting more insourced production, staffed by local people into our school kitchens - and taking a seat at the top tables of school

leadership - to cook food they love for the children they care about, while also reducing avoidable food waste. And we know this can work. We only have to look at The Hackney School of Food, backed by Chefs in Schools - the multi-award-winning food education hub and gardens - in Mandeville School in Clapton, which teaches children how to cook accessible, in-season meals at low cost.

Anyone with children up to the age of 18 can find out whether they are eligible and apply for free school meals [here](#). Free School Meals offer a saving of about £560 per child annually. Schools also attract more funding for each child registered as eligible for free school meals. We know too many Hackney families are missing out on other benefits that are owed to them - funded childcare, healthy start vouchers, disability benefits, and more. To find out what you're entitled to, and to get help applying, contact our team of specialist advisers by searching [Hackney Money Hub](#) or calling 020 8356 3111. To find out what help and support is available both locally and nationally, you can read the Council's [Here to Help booklet](#) - also being distributed across the borough and available in all libraries.

The Tackling Food Poverty in Education Task Force finished its work in March 2023 and made a series of recommendations they believe will help the Council and local schools and partner agencies to be better positioned to address the issues of food poverty in education across our borough. We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the education management, school leaders, partner organisations, and school-based catering staff who contributed to this report. We would like to thank everyone on the Taskforce for their input, scrutiny and the voluntary sector for their contributions on our response to food justice and their commitment to continue to fight for food justice in the future. Our administration is ambitious and committed to doing all that we can to deliver services and outcomes for our residents that reduce inequality and create a fairer borough. The journey to addressing the issues presented by the cost of living crisis will not be straightforward and the challenge is great; but we firmly believe we have the resolve and vision to create a lifetime of prosperity and opportunity for everyone in Hackney.



Philip Glanville
Mayor of Hackney



Cllr Antoinette Bramble
Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for
Education, Young People & Children's Social Care

Acknowledgements from the Tackling Food Poverty in Education Task Group Chair

In compiling this report I would like to formally acknowledge the valuable support and input of Sajeed Patni (Education Finance Lead), Silvi Shrestha (Senior Programme Manager) and Laura Oni (Executive Support to the Director of Education) who formed the Tackling Food Poverty in Education (FPIE) Programme team, with contributions from members of the commission (referenced at appendix A). On behalf of the Programme team I also wish to formally acknowledge the support and shared expertise of the headteachers who supported the working group activity - Richard Brown, Andy English, Louise Nicholls and Jenna Clark. These headteachers were kind enough to share the approaches and experiences of their respective schools in this area of focus, which added considerable value to the work of the programme.

The membership of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee also played an invaluable role in undertaking a programme of research and review with a focus on tackling food poverty for children and young people locally. The report from this interface served as a very helpful pre- cursor to the work of the Tackling Food Poverty in Education task group. **The Scrutiny Committee report is available [here](#)** and provided very helpful insights which informed this work programme.

Additional support for the programme came from members of the London Borough of Hackney, including the Public Health team, with a focus on the Healthy Schools Programme, with input also from organisations such as Chefs in Schools and the Hackney School of Food. As part of the programme's discovery phase I was able to also cross reference with the policy lead for Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) for the Welsh Government, as they progress the intended roll out of UFSM from September 2024, in addition to meetings with members of the Scottish Government, where UFSM for primary age children has been in place for a number of years.

It is in everyone's interests to eliminate the risk of food poverty in education, which has been accelerated by the cost of living crisis being faced by local families. I am hugely grateful to the members of the Tackling Food Poverty in Education Task Group Commission members who have generously shared their experiences, their expertise and their stories, all of which enriched our insights and shaped our recommendations. Thank you. Herein the Commission presents its findings and recommendations. The hard work to implement them must now begin.

Paul Senior

Director of Education and Inclusion

Hackney Council

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INTRODUCTION

Addressing food poverty and supporting residents during the cost of living crisis is a key priority for Hackney Council and our partners. Therefore, it is important to view our ambitions to tackle food poverty in education as being part of a broader package of approaches and policies designed to support children and families during these times.. This plan has to work in tandem with other local policies designed to reduce or mitigate the impact of these challenges and ensure that all children have the best start in life.

In line with the key messages presented in the [Barnardo's report on child poverty](#) in urging for universal free school meals to all pupils, we firmly believe that every Hackney child should have the opportunity to be healthy, no matter their background. This includes access to a nutritious diet, which is critical to growing children. Unfortunately families experiencing forms of disadvantage are more likely to face challenges in providing their children with meals that are optimally nutritious, which can lead to poorer outcomes in their physical and mental health.

For many children and young people, free school meals are their main source of hot, nutritious food. The Task Group considered a range of local, regional and national data as part of the discovery process for this programme of work, in addition to considering the key messages from a range of health impact reports such as the PWC conducted [research](#) on the impact of free school meals on health. This study provides compelling evidence that expanding free school meals to all school children would return £1.71 in economic benefit for every £1 spent.

Our recommendations provide tangible starting points for the Borough in our long-term task to reduce levels of poverty and increase prosperity and aspiration amongst our children, young people and families. Our recommendations are ambitious, but they are eminently achievable - and will have a significant and positive impact on the children and young people in the borough who are currently living in or at risk of facing food poverty.

The Hackney Tackling Food Poverty in Education Commission was established in November 2022 to identify potential local solutions to the challenges of food poverty being felt by families in the current cost of living crisis, with a focus on school meals within the Borough. Data from a recent programme of work led by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee team told us that a free school meals (FSM) eligibility rate of 38.8% for Hackney as a whole masks wide variations of eligibility among local schools and other educational settings. The Commission's research noted that:

- Among primary schools, FSM eligibility ranged from 6% through to 68%, and in 14 schools the FSM eligibility rate was 50% or higher;
- Among secondary schools FSM eligibility ranged from 3% to 68% and in 11 of the 17 local schools was 40% or higher;
- In local special schools and the pupil referral unit (PRU), 63% and 47% of children were respectively entitled to FSM.

METHODOLOGIES OF THE TACKLING FOOD POVERTY IN EDUCATION COMMISSION

The Hackney Tackling Food Poverty in Education Commission (also referred to as task force and task group) carried out a range of activities as part of its process of taking evidence, developing recommendations and producing its report. This included:

- A number of key stakeholder meetings,
- Benchmarking with neighbouring local authority areas,
- Convening a dedicated summit with a focus on tackling food poverty in education,
- Engagement with local and national system leaders, and
- Capturing the views of children, young people and families.

There was extensive discussion amongst Commission members about innovative ways of providing free or low cost school meals to children that were nutritious and healthy. Local Headteachers advised on ways they fund free school meals for all their pupils, such as using income raised from lettings. Other areas explored included;

- The financial implications of providing FSM for all pupils.
- How other local authorities fund free school meals for children in their schools.
- The barriers to families accessing or applying for FSM.
- What the local authority can do to promote the take up of FSM.
- The offer of free breakfast clubs to tackle food poverty.
- Schools getting more value for money on food through group purchasing.
- The work of the Chefs in School charity.
- Help available through the Council to support residents with the cost of living crisis.

The Commission considered a range of written and oral evidence received from organisations and individuals from Hackney and elsewhere. It looked at what works locally already in this area of focus and furthermore what people thought would work to help tackle food poverty in education across the Borough.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Food poverty in education - what does the data and evidence tell us?

All children attending maintained schools, academies and free schools receive the government funded Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) in Reception up to Year 2. From Year 3 onwards, only families eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) receive this support and parents have to apply. Eligibility is dependent on the families' economic background and whether they are in receipt of any benefits like the Universal Credit. In 2022, there were 13,352 pupils eligible for FSM in Hackney, or 38% of all state funded pupils.

The current rate of funding for FSM is £2.41 per pupil meal. The funding rate (set by central government) for FSM has failed to keep pace with price inflation which has led to pressures on school catering services (and their contractors).

Publicly available data tells us about the impact of hunger in the classroom, its effects on learning and the long-term implications for our children. The following are compelling reasons for us to collectively work together to find solutions in response to this critical issue.

01. One in seven children go to school without breakfast (and this is on the increase), significantly impacting on the learning ability of children who lack the basic fuel required to concentrate and learn.
02. 2.4 pupils in every class in England and Wales will arrive at school hungry at least once a week.
03. Around 8,370 schools in England have children arriving hungry or thirsty every morning.
04. If a child arrives at school hungry, teachers say they lose one hour of learning time a day.
05. If a child arrived at school hungry once a week they would lose 8.4 weeks of learning time (70 percent of a term) over the whole of their primary school life.
06. 31 percent of teachers say they have to spend a disproportionately higher amount of teaching time with children who arrive at school hungry, than with those who don't.
07. The grip of hunger could potentially cost the English economy millions of pounds each year through teachers losing teaching hours to cope with the needs of hungry children.

2. WHAT IMPACT DOES FOOD POVERTY HAVE ON A CHILD'S LEARNING AND EDUCATION?

Common themes and points of reference from our research:

01. Hungry children are less able to cope with the challenges of each day and more likely to struggle emotionally. Hunger and malnutrition affect a child's ability to concentrate, to take in and retain new information, and to make good progress in their learning.
02. A study by the Centre for Educational Neuroscience called [Diet makes a difference to learning](#) found that 14% of UK school children skip breakfast, with this being more likely to be the case in secondary school children and children living in areas of deprivation. The study shows that when a child misses breakfast, performance is most clearly affected when tasks are more mentally demanding and when they involve working memory (storing and manipulating information in the short term).
03. Expanding Free School Meals would generate up to £41.3 billion for the economy | Food Foundation: see research [here](#).
04. An evaluation of the Universal free school meals programme in Scotland can be seen [here](#).

3. UNIVERSAL FREE SCHOOL MEALS FOR PRIMARY AGE CHILDREN IN LONDON FOR 2023/24

In February 2023, the Mayor of London announced his plans to provide funding for free school meals for all Primary school pupils in London for an academic year, from September 2023 to August 2024. In light of this announcement, the DfE has had to rethink how to distribute the funding for the best outcome and to avoid duplication. This is a welcome development for Hackney's children, however, it is important to stress that this is a one-off £130m payment for one academic year (2023-24) in response to the cost of living crisis, and longer term solutions must still be developed.

The work of the Hackney Tackling Food Poverty in Education task force was already at an advanced stage with regards to its programme of work, having been commissioned by the Hackney Council Mayor several months before the London Mayor's announcement. This meant that we were already looking at opportunities for learning what works locally in this space, building on the good practice in Hackney and seeking to find longer term sustainable solutions in response to local needs.

Unfortunately, the proposed funding from the London Mayor's Office is currently earmarked for children attending state funded provision and at the time of writing this report we are unlikely to receive anything for the independent sector, which is a significant issue for a number of our communities in Hackney. The latest data tells us that approximately 30% of children of primary school age in Hackney are from the Orthodox Charedi Community.

4. RISING LEVELS OF NEED AND FOOD INSECURITY

Rising numbers of children eligible for FSM is a clear indicator of the level of poverty and food insecurity within the local community. FSM eligibility in Hackney has grown significantly over the past 5 years where the proportion of children in state funded education eligible for FSM has risen from 27.7% in 2017/18 to 38.8% in 2021/22. These most recent figures indicate that over 13,300 local children are now entitled to free daily lunchtime meals in school. The rate of FSM eligibility in Hackney is also far higher than both national (22.5%) and regional (24.6%) averages, and is the 7th highest among all English local authorities.

School meals are provided free of charge to all children in years 1 and 2 in state funded primary education. Pupils are entitled to FSM beyond years 1 and 2 if their parents meet the [set eligibility criteria](#), which is now predominantly centred upon Universal Credit entitlement with an income threshold £7,400 per annum.

5. INCREASING FSM UPTAKE WITHIN THE ORTHODOX JEWISH COMMUNITY

Children from the Charedi Community make up a large percentage of the children population in Hackney. Many of them attend independent settings, which means that even if they live in low income households, they are not eligible for the government funded FSM support.

As part of this programme, Hackney Education Officers convened to discuss the issues of food poverty that persists in the Charedi Community and what Hackney Council and Hackney Education could do within their remit to support the Charedi Community;

- Establish the scale of need in Hackney for a clearer picture of food poverty within the Charedi community.
- Use established channels of communication with the central government about getting important messages and local context across.
- Find out what Haringey Council is doing to support its Charedi community who are not eligible for government support.

In replacement of free school meals, the Household Support Fund 3 (September to March 2023) has supported 11 Charedi organisations with a total of £426,000 for food, reaching approximately 9,000 children under 19 and 1800 households. The funding will be renewed for the coming financial year for HSF 4 (April 2023 to March 2024), and will be £852,000 for the whole year (as opposed to 6 months for HSF 3).

Findings from the work of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission looking at food poverty locally highlighted further concerns around accessibility and uptake of FSM within the Orthodox Jewish community in Hackney. Local data indicates that FSM eligibility in maintained Orthodox Jewish schools was approximately 6% compared to a borough wide average of 38%.

On the assumption that parents within the orthodox Jewish community are likely to be experiencing similar levels of food poverty and insecurity as the broader Hackney population, this would suggest that there may be specific barriers to the uptake of FSM and that children from this community may be missing out on possible entitlements.

Understanding this and the low uptake of FSM in the maintained school sector, it is clear that further engagement is needed with local Orthodox Jewish schools and community leaders to further understand the barriers to FSM uptake and to ensure that local food poverty networks and programmes continue to connect to and reach into the Orthodox Jewish Community.

6. EASING THE FINANCIAL PRESSURE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

For families, supporting children to grow up has never been cheap. However, awareness of today's cost of bringing up children has increased in importance because of the influence it has on parental abilities to meet children's needs. Where children are at risk of food poverty, especially those who live in low income families, parents will frequently cut back on fruit and vegetable intake, cut back on food shopping, and reduce the amount they eat to protect their children.

In 2013, Ipsos MORI conducted a survey of child hunger for the Greater London Authority. The findings showed that 55% of parents across income groups reported their ability to afford food has gotten a lot or a little worse over the past year; 49% of parents in full-time work also reported this experience. We can only assume that this has gotten worse given the cost of living crisis and the financial pressures of the last few years. Similarly, the 2018 Child Poverty Action Group report, *Cost of A Child*, highlights that most parents would do everything in their power to avoid their children having to grow up below a minimum acceptable standard of living. There are several benefits for parents related to easing the pressure on supporting their children. The 2018 national evaluation of UFSM reported that parents who no longer had to make packed lunches reported a median weekly saving of £10, removed the stigma in claiming free meals, assisted with household budgets and allowed parents more time to support and spend with their children.

7. DIET AND NUTRITION

Good nutrition from an early age is important. As children grow, muscles and bones are being built and the brain is developing. This requires good nutritious food every day. Findings from recent local Health Related Behaviours Questionnaires tell us that a low percentage of Year 6 pupils ate at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables on the day before the survey compared with 29% nationally. For primary school pupils, 6% said they didn't eat any portions of fruit or vegetables on the day before the survey, compared with 9% nationally.

Informed by learning from other local areas currently providing access to universal free school meals (UFSM), it can be suggested that UFSM has been a catalyst for efforts to improve healthy eating in school. In Hackney, a school meal is supposed to provide a third of the nutrient requirement of the day. This means that school meals only make up 17% of the overall diet of a child across the whole school year which makes it challenging to reflect health outcomes related to FSM. However, there is strong evidence that increasing the take up of school meals improves the nutritional balance of food eaten during the day.

School meals are required to meet nationally agreed **standards** to ensure that children are provided with lunchtime meals which are balanced (in terms of starches and proteins) and nutritious. Whilst the local authority (and partners) clearly has an interest in ensuring that schools meet school food standards (diet and general well being) and has the relevant corporate experience to be able to support this (e.g. Public Health, Food Hygiene) it nonetheless has no responsibility in this matter. Accountability of nutritional standards of school meals is now devolved to local school governing bodies, and many schools have now commissioned independent assessments to support this.

The Commission also noted the positive relationships that a number of schools had developed with not-for-profit organisations to support compliance to nutritional standards. These organisations provided the expertise to ensure that school food was nutritious, balanced and complied with required standards.

8. LEARNING AND ATTAINMENT

Food insecurity has major adverse impacts on schoolchildren such as concentration, social participation and aspirations. Public Health England concludes that there are promising associations between diet and academic attainment. However, it is difficult to attribute a causal link between diet and attainment because of the range of other factors in the school environment that also affect academic attainment. It also points to evidence that a whole-school approach to healthy school meals, universally implemented for all pupils, has shown improvements in academic attainment at Key Stages 1 and 2, especially for pupils with lower prior attainment. Between 2009 and 2012, pupils in the UFSM pilots in Newham and Durham were found to be up to two months ahead in maths and english.

9. SCHOOL MEALS AND NUTRITIONAL VALUE

The focus on the nutritional composition of foods for school aged children should be oriented towards supporting their growth and educational attainment at school. Consumption of unhealthy food at this life stage could compromise their nutritional status and thereby their growth and development. These unhealthy foods can have a negative impact on weight management in children, leading to further weight gain as adults. Therefore, special attention must be placed on the nutritional quality of each meal in order to ensure children obtain the nutrients they need for optimal health. School lunch is a pivotal meal in every child's day. It presents an opportunity for children to receive part of their daily nutritional requirements and may also serve as an opportunity to receive a nutritious meal that will enhance their learning.

Due to the rising levels of obesity, it is also important for children to eat healthy food at school and to learn about healthy eating in order to make informed choices at home and in their communities. Schools play an important role in providing nutritious food to their pupils. In England, there has been notable progress in school meal provision.

In the last two decades, the type and quality of the food offered in schools has undergone dramatic changes and now reflects a more varied diet to support children's nutritional requirements. Several initiatives, such as Jamie Oliver's 2004 'Feed Me Better' campaign and the Channel 4 documentary 'Jamie's School Food', have promoted positive changes by shifting focus to the quality of food provided in schools. This heightened public awareness was transformed into action by significant government funding and political will at the time.

10. ENCOURAGING FAMILIES TO APPLY FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Families are actively encouraged to register for FSM as this supports school access to the Pupil Premium Grant (see below). This is promoted through a variety of methods including:

- The use of biometric systems in schools (mainly secondary) so that FSM eligible pupils / students are not identifiable and therefore reduce any stigma. Hackney Council encourages schools to use the FSM eligibility checking system (through the Catering Support Team) so that families do not have to produce benefits related paperwork and take this to admin within a school.
- Schools share clear and simple information on their websites, through text messaging and newsletters about the benefits of FSM / Healthy Start vouchers and how to apply.
- Extending the lunchtime period in secondary schools so that students can use their FSM entitlement for mid-morning break, this especially benefits pupils that may not have had breakfast.
- Linking with other services/partners to encourage FSM applications and uptake from families facing financial difficulties .
- Promoting FSM criteria and how to apply on London Borough of Hackney website - Schools introducing a 'free' breakfast for any FSM pupil are to encourage pupils and families to apply for FSM.
- Encouraging families to apply for FSM so they can access support for winter clothing and shoes from the Benevolent Fund and other educational activities such as school trips, music tuition etc.

FSM eligibility and Pupil Premium Grant (PPG)

The Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) provides additional funding that publicly funded schools in England use to support disadvantaged pupils and is triggered by a child's eligibility for FSM. The Pupil Premium Grant provides funding to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils of all abilities to reach their potential and to support children and young people with parents in the regular armed forces. It is in a school's best interest to register as many FSM pupils as possible, as for some schools this can make a significant difference to their overall budget. Most schools actively encourage families to register for FSM when pupils are starting school and have robust systems in place to monitor ongoing FSM eligibility. Support should be given to FSM eligible families when their children are not in school such as during school holidays or periods of absence.

In this scheme, schools receive an annual Pupil Premium payment of £1,385 for primary school aged children and £985 for secondary school aged children. Therefore, ensuring that children and families who are entitled to FSM are encouraged to apply is not only important to ensure that children have access to healthy and nutritious food each day, it can also provide an important contribution to school budgets through Pupil Premium funding.

The financial contribution of Pupil Premium funding (through FSM eligibility) for the local education sector is significant. Based on the current number of pupils eligible for FSM in Hackney (13,352), local primary schools benefit to the value of an additional £9.7m of funding through the Pupil Premium funding and secondary schools a further £6.2m. Given the scale of such contributions to local education, there is clearly a need for a more strategic view of FSM eligibility and the need to share learning across the sector on those strategies which are effective in supporting parental applications and uptake.

11. BARRIERS TO FAMILIES APPLYING FOR AND PUPILS TAKING FREE SCHOOL MEALS

The financial circumstances for some families eligible for free school meals can change over time. Under the current criteria, families eligible for FSM remain 'protected' until 2023 even if their financial circumstances change. Several families report that despite remaining eligible they no longer wish their child to take a FSM.

Perceived or enacted stigma is considered by headteachers to be one of the biggest barriers to increasing take up of free school meals as some families have negative preconceptions of the FSM system, believing that school staff would have access to their financial information. Schools are encouraged to use the FSM eligibility checking system to reduce the need for school staff to check benefits related paperwork.

Pupils and families choosing not to take a FSM do so for several reasons including food preferences, pupils choosing to do what friends and peers do, the broader lunchtime experience e.g., having to queue, menu choices etc. Schools are encouraged to regularly review their FSM take up and where relevant put an action plan in place.

12. CATERING FRAMEWORK AND SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS

Schools engaged in supporting the work of the taskforce and also those who spoke to the Scrutiny Committee members as part of their review process, reported being keen to develop more collaborative ways of working to help reduce costs associated with school meal provision, in particular the sourcing and purchase of seasonal produce and foodstuffs. In this respect, it was noted that it could be helpful for local schools to have access to a digital platform to help source and bulk-buy produce to help to reduce costs. It was noted here, that a local school food charity, **Chefs in School**, supports a similar such initiative to participating schools.

13. CHEFS IN SCHOOL

The Food Poverty Task & Finish Group heard from **Chefs in School**, which is a charity that is supporting schools to work with each other in the most effective way. Currently, the charity is looking to harness the collective purchasing power of schools - working to set up procurement systems to get bulk buying deals, with a focus on quality as well as buying locally. Chefs in Schools is in the process of setting up a network with the 70 schools they work with nationally. This would operate on a not-for-profit model, in contrast to many of the existing procurement networks, and would focus on purchasing quality food at lower prices. This would be available to all in-house schools.

14. THE HACKNEY SCHOOL OF FOOD

The Hackney School of Food (HSoF) is a vibrant cookery school established by the LEAP Federation of Schools (Gayhurst Community School, Mandeville Primary and Kingsmead Primary) in partnership with the charity Chefs in Schools. The Hackney School of Food is designed to be a cooking centre to inspire, support and develop a love of cooking in people of all ages and levels of experience from young children to experienced chefs. The HSoF offers schools and our community a broad range of cookery courses to teach children and their families to cook nourishing food from scratch.

15. BREAKFAST CLUB PROVISION

Findings from the work of this Commission and the review process carried out by the Scrutiny Committee tells us that most schools offer some form of breakfast club provision, though the scale, nature and focus of such clubs varied widely among local schools. Therefore, whilst some schools targeted support to vulnerable children and families, other schools had a more extensive school-wide offer. For a number of schools, breakfast club provision was seen as integral to the schools wraparound support offer for pupils, with additional play, learning and mentoring support also taking place alongside the provision of breakfast.

Schools that contributed to our work noted the importance of support they received from not-for-profit organisations in the delivery of their breakfast clubs, such as **Magic Breakfast**, who not only provided access to free or low cost breakfast foodstuffs (bagels, cereals, porridge, beans), but also supported access to wider regional food distribution programmes.

Given the increasing numbers of children who were reported to be accessing school without having had breakfast and hungry, schools emphasised the positive impact that breakfast clubs had on pupil engagement in subsequent lessons and classes. Equally important however, schools noted that the earlier start to the school day allowed by breakfast clubs was of great value to working parents or those parents whose children attended different schools. In this context, it is important to emphasise the role that Breakfast clubs play in the wraparound care and support of children.

Key messages and considerations:

01. Breakfast clubs can support nutritional, social and educational outcomes. Ensure free school meal eligible children can come for free, for example by using pupil premium or other funds where appropriate. Consider finding sponsorship from local businesses or charities.
02. The National School Breakfast programme in England is funded by the Department for Education. In partnership with **Family Action**, **Magic Breakfast** is a national charity that delivers free, nutritious breakfasts to 1775 schools in disadvantaged communities across the country (where at least 50% of pupils fall within IDACI bands A-F -the most disadvantaged categories in the Government's 'Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index').
03. Read the progress report: **Food for Thought**, where the evaluation found that supporting schools to run a free, universal breakfast club before school delivered an average of two months' additional progress for pupils.
04. The process by which eligible schools can apply for support for breakfast club provision - for more information visit the **Government's website**.
05. Evidence suggests that free holiday clubs such as the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) can have a positive impact on children and young people. They work best when they are easily accessible and provide consistent enrichment activities, for more than just breakfast or lunch, and when they involve children (and parents) in food preparation.
06. Holiday Kitchen offers family learning, food and play opportunities during the school holidays to children in parts of the UK. The aim is to improve children's well-being, educational outcomes and life-chances through fun activities and experiences. The **evaluation report** includes useful learning on how to run a scheme that is enjoyable, non-stigmatising and adds value through educational and health activities.
07. **Make Lunch** is a national charity that partners churches with schools to open community kitchens in the holidays.

16. HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES FUND PROGRAMME (HAF)

In addition to the food/fuel vouchers children and young people have been able to access the holiday activities fund programme during each holiday period. Any child taking part is provided with nutritious and healthy food as part of the activity. The data tells us that the Holiday Activities & Food (HAF) programme, among others, have consistently made a difference to local families in making sure that children with the greatest level of need continue to have access to meals during the school holiday period.

17. SCHOOL MEALS AND PROCUREMENT

The LA Procurement service is working with Council partners to launch a project to tender a Dynamic Purchasing System or Framework for Catering Solutions in schools. The Council would create and manage the Framework/DPS which schools would then use to award their own individual contracts. This would allow the schools to benefit from economies of scale whilst also delivering on Council objectives in areas such as nutritional standards, sustainability and the London Living Wage.

The Service is currently in the early stages of stakeholder engagement, market testing and data gathering but the intention is to develop the tender documentation by the end of the year and work towards contract awards for the start of the school year in September 2024. This would be dependent on positive engagement from a sufficient number of schools with the appetite and resources to deliver this timetable. By offering a DPS/Framework approach applicants can be admitted at any time.

18. CLIMATE FRIENDLY MEALS

Nearly 10% of London's consumption-based greenhouse gas emissions come from food. Many of London's local authorities have pledged to achieve net-zero emissions in their operations by 2030, which is being pursued through One World Living (OWL). This objective represents a shared and minimum level of ambition for London's local authorities to enhance the health and environmental impacts of the food they provide, while also reducing the amount of food waste generated. At a local level Hackney has three policy frameworks to encourage more plant based meals, not only in schools but across the borough:

- **Hackney's Climate Action Plan:** The plan has five themes, and one of them is the Consumption theme. This theme includes a food goal that aims to ensure healthy, plant-based diets are widespread while also reducing rates of food poverty. The addition of these goals and the subsequent actions in the three year implementation plan has been recognised by Sustain.
- **The Hackney Mayor's Manifesto Commitments 2022-26** has two commitments that mention plant based meals, 1-Increase uptake of climate-friendly foods (180) and 2-Develop a Healthy Schools Charter including including plant-based schools meals (69);

- **OWL & London Councils:** Hackney is leading the food emissions theme on behalf of London boroughs, working closely with ReLondon and Sustain to deliver two main actions; 1-Pan London sustainable diet and food waste campaign, **Eat Like a Londoner**, launched on 27 March and 2-The London's Sustainable Food Purchasing Commitment to reduce carbon emissions in council catering contracts.

London's sustainable food purchasing **commitment** was launched by Hackney's Sustainability Team to all London boroughs on 27 March, alongside Sustain and ReLondon. The commitment is a common and minimum level of ambition for all London councils to commit to three objectives:

01. Reducing food emissions: Decrease the amount of emissions dioxide produced per plate by 38% by 2030 compared to the amount produced in 2023, or less than 1.04 kilograms of carbon dioxide per plate for children.
02. Reducing food waste: Measure food waste annually from 2023 and reduce food waste by 50% by 2030 based on this baseline.
03. Food provenance: Measure how much of the total ingredients is spent on food that supports fairer, sustainable, and farmer-focused production. This includes purchasing from SMEs or farmers within or close to the borough, through dynamic food procurement, organic produce, fairtrade, MSC certified fish and any free-range meat, dairy or eggs.

Hackney is working towards becoming one of the first signatory to this commitment, which will show dedication to implementing the actions for all food that is directly procured by our local authority, including school meals. Additionally, we will have a commitment to encourage other procurers and food providers in our borough and all of London, particularly schools, early year settings, and anchor institutions such as hospital trusts, to adopt similar catering arrangements in alignment with our established commitments.

Climate friendly meals must provide students with the necessary nutrients for their growth and development. By focusing on nutrition, schools can help to promote healthy eating habits and prevent obesity and other health issues. Additionally, serving healthy meals can help to reduce the carbon footprint of school meals by promoting plant-based diets and reducing the amount of meat and dairy that is served. Plant-based dishes constitute just over a quarter of the emissions of a meat-based dish, and about half of the amount of a veggie dish. It is worth noting that plant based meals have fewer allergens and they are more inclusive for different faiths eating specific diets. Some examples of climate friendly meal actions that schools can take include:

- Promoting plant-based diets and reducing the amount of meat and dairy served. An example of a weekly school menu could include two meat free days, one fish day, one meat day (chicken or pork, no beef) and one meat day blend with plant based.
- Removing beef and substituting for meats with a lower carbon impact such as chicken, pork or lamb.
- Adopting veggie days can reduce emissions with likely cost saving from buying less meat.
- Ensuring there is always a healthy, appetising, affordable vegan option available on the menu

encourages inclusivity for those with a vegan diet. Exciting plant based options encourage meat-eaters to diversify their diets.

- Sourcing local vegetables from small scale suppliers, likely to reduce emissions and for each £1 spent through direct supply chains delivers £3 to the local economy. This can be achieved via a dynamic procurement model which has been shown to reduce costs.
- Reducing the amount of meat in 'meat' dishes, by replacing them with pulses, legumes or vegetables also reduce emissions and reduce costs.
- Sourcing locally grown and seasonal ingredients.
- Reducing food waste through composting and recycling.

There is free support from ProVeg with their School plates guide and recipes with carbon labels, allergen, key nutrients and the average cost of main dishes (54 pence), which are considerably cheaper than most meat and dairy alternatives. They can also support schools and catering providers with reviewing school menus by removing negative language "meat-free" and replacing it with more positive language or moving the plant based dish to the top row of a menu, which gets picked more than the dishes underneath. Examples of low carbon, healthy, cheap and tasty meals include homemade cottage pie, toad-in-hole, golden Spanish paella and, courgetti with homemade cheesy croutons. The following are some examples of the nutritional value and cost per plate of plant based meals:

- Spaghetti bolognese: Costing 44p, 0.6 fat, 8.5 gram fibre, 16 grams protein, 1 kg CO2 per meal.
- Sri Lankan Sweet potato and coconut curry: Costing 49p per meal, 6.9 gr of fibre, 6.7 gr protein, low sugar, low salt, omega 3, calcium, iron, zinc and iodine with a 0.28kg CO2 per meal, well under the commitment target.

On 7 March 2023, the Mayor chaired an event bringing together representatives from the education sector and catering services. There were 35 attendees, 43 % (15) from a school or education setting, 31 % (11) from catering companies and 26 % (9) Council officers from sustainability, education and procurement. Speakers from ReLondon, ProVeg, the Council's Sustainability Team and Public Health addressed issues including:

- Highlighting the importance of healthy and climate friendly food diets in an education setting
- Encouraging schools to include sustainable food actions in current or future contracts, and
- Covering the health and environmental benefits, such as nutrition basics, useful ingredients people may not be familiar with and how to best use them

Following the session a survey was sent out to gather a baseline on sustainable food practices in schools. The survey results were encouraging: 70% of respondents supported introducing two meat-free days per week, supplemented by 'less but better meat' and increased plant-based meals, the aim of the London's Food Purchasing Commitment which Hackney is about to sign up to. Furthermore, 78% expressed readiness to sign up for London's Food Purchasing Commitment, it showed interest in obtaining more information. There was also a strong demand for support in areas like training, educational resources, menu development, and community engagement.

In response to this need, the Sustainability Team has partnered with various organisations to offer plant-based cooking training, the first session (during Climate Action Week) of which was fully booked. These partners will further assist schools and catering providers by providing plant-based school meal cooking guides, carbon-labelled recipes, and advice on allergens, key nutrients, and average dish costs. They can also help revise school menus to promote plant-based dishes, by replacing negative language like "meat-free" with positive language and positioning plant-based dishes prominently on menus, a strategy proven to encourage selection.

In conclusion, the adoption of climate-friendly meals in our schools is not just a climate friendly strategy to reduce environmental impact, it's a bold investment in the future of Hackney children and our planet. By embracing this initiative, the council is strongly demonstrating its commitment to sustainability, health, and community engagement. We're setting an example to other boroughs and regions to follow, challenging them to prioritise the well-being of our planet, and to create a brighter future for generations to come.

Primary and secondary schools play a pivotal role in helping children (and teachers/parents/wider community) to develop positive healthy behaviours and habits by raising awareness of healthy behaviours and by increasing children's exposure to fun and varied healthy activities, as well creating more active, healthy environments.

In Hackney, there are many great local schemes that can support schools to address this work (Holiday Activity Fund, School Streets, Daily Mile, healthy weight services, mental health provision, healthy catering support). There is also school based support commissioned through Public Health and delivered through Young Hackney around a range of public health issues, such as physical activity, sexual health and smoking cessation health promotion.

The Council is seeking to increase its understanding of the full range/extent of health and wellbeing initiatives that local schools deliver, and what support could help them (further) embed healthy school principles (improvements in physical activity, healthy eating/school menus, food poverty, emotional health, oral health, sexual health, drug and alcohol use, smoking cessation).

Some schools will already have programmes of work in place to support pupils' wellbeing. However, there would be a huge benefit to a wider school network of more consistently adopting approaches that embed wellbeing principles and having a joined up, whole school approach to health and wellbeing.

By supporting local schools in this way, we will help children and families in Hackney to live healthy lives, as well as meet relevant manifesto priorities.

19. HEALTHY SCHOOLS PROGRAMME - HACKNEY EDUCATION AND PUBLIC HEALTH JOINT WORKING (AN APPROACH TO TEST AND LEARN)

A Healthy Schools Coordinator post has been created (for an initial period of 2 years) to support schools to embed healthy schools initiatives, in order to improve children and young people's and families' wellbeing. 1 x FTE post will not be enough to support all schools, but a prioritisation framework will be developed to consider which schools will be supported through the post.

The aim of the role will be to encourage schools to improve their health promoting environments through a local set of standards and suite of interventions, support pupils to develop healthy behaviours, reduce health inequalities, and improve educational achievement.

This proposed new post will offer much needed capacity to lead on a programme of work to strategically support schools to improve pupil wellbeing and healthy habits, incorporating relevant manifesto commitments, ensuring that school environments are health promoting places within the community. Some schools will already have programmes of work in place to support pupils' wellbeing. However, there would be a huge benefit to a wider school network that adopts approaches that embed wellbeing principles and have a joined up, whole school approach to health and wellbeing.

By supporting local schools in this way, we will help children and families in Hackney to live healthy lives.

The role is proposed to support schools with wellbeing plans, related to the following themes (where required):

- Physical activity (using Sports Premium funding to support the needs of all pupils to decrease inactivity levels)
- Healthy school environments (healthy catering, using Sports Premium funding, water only schools, healthy school meals, Daily Mile, active travel, Holiday Activity Fund support)
- Healthy weight support
- Food poverty (promotion of local support)
- Emotional wellbeing and mental health (working in partnership with WAHMS team)
- Oral health
- Sexual health
- Smoking cessation
- Alcohol and substance misuse

Learning from neighbouring Local Authority (LA) areas and Hackney School Case Studies

A number of schools in Hackney provide free school meals for all its pupils regardless of their families' economic background. The Commission heard from the following schools about their offer of free school meals to their pupils; Urswick Secondary School, Mandeville Primary School and Gainsborough Primary School. This offer for all pupils has meant that the stigma attached to receiving free school meals is reduced. In addition to providing free meals, the schools ensure the meals are healthy and environmentally sustainable.

All schools cited the potential loss of PPG as a negative impact of providing free school meals for all pupils. If universally available for all students, parents do not need to apply for the government funded FSM which results in the loss of the grant for schools.

The offer of FSM is important in supporting not just the outcomes of vulnerable children but is crucial for Hackney as it mitigates the risk of pupils opting for schools in the neighbouring boroughs who provide free school meals to all its pupils, amid falling pupil roll numbers.

Urswick School (Secondary)

- 65 -70 % of the School's pupils are eligible for the government funded FSM.
- The offer of free school meals for all pupils started in 2015 and costs the school £8000 to £10,000 annually. The school is able to provide free school meals for its pupils with income generated from lettings.
- This offer has been popular with parents. It has been positive in terms of increasing pupil numbers in the context of falling pupil roll in Hackney.
- Refurbished the school kitchen which is designed to match a high intensity model. Better provision and flexibility of equipment.
- The School encourages families to apply for FSM by providing administrative support; school staff check parents' eligibility and apply on their behalf.
- It is a priority for the school and Governors always support this work.

Mandeville School (Primary)

- 63 % of pupils in School receive PPG, therefore, receive the government funded free school meals. It costs the School £17k per year to ensure all the children at Mandeville get free meals.
- Drivers for this initiative were due to food poverty as well as health. The free meals provided are nutritious and the school's food education programme supports healthy eating.
- School also has a food growing programme. The School's kitchen staff understand the importance of seasonality.
- School has in house food management with highly trained kitchen staff. School also works closely with the charity Chefs in School.

- The School has incentivised parents to complete the FSM application by offering families a school sweatshirt. By providing FSM for all schools, admin costs and time is saved on chasing school meals debt.

Gainsborough School (Primary)

- School offers 3 meals to all its pupils. The initiative providing free school meals for all pupils has been running since 2018.
- School is focused on providing high quality and nutritious meals.
- Cooking is also linked to History and Geography.
- School checks National Insurance (NI) and eligibility as part of the admissions policy to ensure PPG is not lost.
- School works creatively to sustain the offer - understanding the costs, working with other organisations, looking at carbon reduction, growing your own food to sell (circular food project).
- Sustainability of the offer at Gainsborough - The School has saved money from administrative costs (around £1500) of having to chase parents for lunch money. The circular food project could potentially be income generating; growing and selling food should make the school self-sufficient.
- School has worked with the charity Chefs in School.

Other schools in Hackney, like Our Lady's Catholic Secondary School have not increased the cost for school meals for 5 to 7 years to keep prices affordable for young people. Universal Breakfast Club is also offered for free. The School provides after school snacks for after school provisions. The School is reliant on external partners for one-off support to fund their offer of subsidised meals; for example, the school received £11K from one company. School is constantly looking for new sponsors.

Chefs in School

The charity is supporting schools to work with each other in the most effective way. Currently, the charity is looking to harness the collective purchasing power of schools - working to set up procurement systems to get bulk buying deals, with focus on quality as well as buying locally.

Chefs in Schools is in the process of setting up a network with the 70 schools they work with nationally. This would operate on a not-for-profit model, in contrast to many of the existing procurement networks, and would focus on purchasing quality food at lower prices. This would be available to all in-house schools.

Opportunities explored

There are opportunities for forming stronger and reciprocal partnership networks with food partners. With regards to bulk buying, the big issue is space for storing food. There is a great opportunity to think on how to join up this work. Food partners were interested in finding storage space. This was a welcome opportunity to explore options for schools to work with food partners. Follow up with schools to broker conversation - matching interested partners with school.

Other London Boroughs that provide Free School Meals for All Pupils

London Borough of Newham

- Universal provision in Primary schools, years 3-6 funded (Eat for free scheme). Originally implemented in Newham as a pilot by DfE in 2009. Newham has funded it since 2012 at a cost of approximately £6m per year. Schools are funded at £2.42 per meal. Juniper Ventures, a LA trading company provides catering in around 75% of the Primary schools.
- Schools incentivise FSM applications through various methods. One Primary school in Newham offered the chance to enter a draw on completion of an application to win an iPad for example.
- Newham consulted on reducing the scheme to make savings in 2021 by either asking parents with children not eligible for a FSM for a contribution or/and asking out of borough children not eligible for a FSM to pay for their meals. This was in order to try and achieve a saving of up to £1.9m. After consultation, the **decision** was made not to take forward any of these proposals.

London Borough of Southwark

- Piloted in January 2011, free school meals were offered from September 2013 to all Primary school children. The offer was extended to children in maintained nurseries and nursery classes in primary schools in 2019.
- It was funded at £2.41 per meal from September 2022, up from £1.90 per meal. It costs £462k per year for nursery and just over £3m per year for Primary Y3-Y6. The initiative is funded from Public Health Grant.
- There is a 91% take-up rate assumed which is average attendance. Actual take-up closer to around 70-80% for KS2.
- Schools incentivise FSM applications by offering free breakfast club or after school club for a week if an application is completed, and by linking FSM application to free uniform application.
- Going forward, FHSM grant conditions introduced in September 2022, will support further monitoring and evaluation of the success of FHSM, to include universal school lunch, actual take up rate, value for money and nutrition standards monitoring. The Council previously relied on schools' own internal governance.
- Large contracts like primary and universal borough provision would have more leverage with suppliers. Looking at trying to centralise commissioning to secure more leverage with suppliers. Currently a mixture of in-house and contract provision and schools tender every 2 or 3 years which requires a lot of commissioning support.

Westminster City Council

- Westminster City Council implemented the free school meal offer for all primary school pupils for a fixed term, from January 2023 for an initial period up to the end of July 2024, by way of supporting families with the cost of living crisis. The funding for this will be met with the Council's earmarked reserves.

- The total estimated cost of the provision of a free school meal offer for primary aged pupils over term time from January 2023 to the end of the 2023/24 academic year is £2,781,784. The methodology used to determine the funding for each school will be £3 per pupil per day over 190 days in an academic year.
- A contingency of £100,000 has been included. The reasons for this are that the final Autumn 2022 census data will not be available until early December and to mitigate the potential risk that parents will stop applying for Free School Meals because the offer is free and universal, resulting in an increased cost to the borough.

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

- Since 2014 Council-funded Free School Meals extends provision above the government's Universal Infant Free School Meal scheme so it also covers those at KS2 who aren't eligible for government-funded FSM.
- The cost for this initiative in 2021/22 was £2.771m and the funding comes from £1m of Public Health Grant, remainder from 'Mayors Priority Budget' (General Fund). In previous years the amount of funding has exceeded £3m.
- Schools can sometimes generate a surplus from the programme, as funding is provided on an average meal price and at 100% take-up rate. Procedures to retrieve excess funding have had to be put in place and can take resources in terms of staff time to manage.
- Schools have to actively encourage parents to apply for FSM in primary schools, since FSM eligibility is required to secure Pupil Premium funding. This includes holding workshop mornings to assist parents in completing their application if they need help.
- Currently, schools are reimbursed by the Mayor's programme on the basis of the average number of school meals identified from the school census data. The MOU states that schools are to be reimbursed only for the actual number of meals served paid monthly in arrears. The financial saving (for the Council) will be the difference between census data and actual number of meals taken.

London Borough of Islington

- Since 2010, the Council has provided free school meals to all maintained nursery and primary school pupils in Islington, but you need to register.
- Entitled to free school meals if they are attending:
 - Islington Children's centres and early years centres
 - a children's centre in an Islington primary school
 - North Islington, Margaret McMillan or Kate Greenaway nurseries
- a primary school in Islington from the age of three, full time.

- The current annual operating cost is funded from GF (£1.1m) and PH grant contribution (of £727k), totalling approximately £1.8m.
- A high number of pupils in the borough are eligible for FSM compared to other boroughs. During the pandemic the FSM eligibility increased so costs have reduced. Meals are funded at £2.00 per meal, which hasn't changed for some time.
- To mitigate the risk of parents not applying for FSM, the Council has made it mandatory for all parents to register for FSM. As a result of this approach, there has been an increase in FSM eligibility and it has reduced any stigma attached to applying for a FSM as every parent has to apply in order to receive the Council funded meal.
- There was a significant increase in actual take-up of meals, from 55-65% to 85-90%. Capital investment was required to prepare kitchens to accommodate uptake increase. There were set-up fees and project management costs too. Ran a pilot initially, went ahead with 6 pilot schools. Went live in March 2010 across the borough. The pilot worked for them and helped to iron out some of the thinking and to review kitchens and assess the needs of each school.
- Procurement-wise there is a pooled arrangement for primary schools with the majority of schools buying into a contract with an external provider; there are 4 or 5 LA Primary schools that don't buy into the catering contract and some academies have their own arrangement.
- For the non-pooled arrangement (where a school has their own kitchen or their own provider) the school is asked to complete a monthly form, breaking down the number of meals taken on any given day for a monthly period and they are funded accordingly at £2 per meal for an ineligible child.

TACKLING FOOD POVERTY IN EDUCATION PROGRAMME - RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the London Borough of Hackney in line with a working Action Plan (timelines are advisory and may be subject to change)

01. **By October 2023**, to progress implementation of the recommendations and the key messages in this report, the Director of Education will lead the production of an associated draft action plan to be presented to the Cost of Living Board (or equivalent local governance/ oversight model).
02. **In the London Borough of Hackney**, the lead responsibility for developing the tackling food poverty in education action plan to respond to the cost of living crisis should sit with the Cost of Living Board (CLB) or equivalent governance forum.
03. **By October 2023** - London Borough of Hackney should explore the potential for establishing a local School Food Trust model (or equivalent) to oversee free school meals for all primary age school pupils with the ultimate aim of developing a programme to sustain the delivery of universal free school meals beyond the 2023/2024 commitment made by the London Mayor.
04. **By September 2023** - the development of the Tackling Food Poverty in Education action plan should gather inputs from all the Portfolios across the Council as well as the senior leadership team in relation to the key issues within their services and communities. The key overarching areas already identified for issues we need to focus on include:
 - a. Reviewing commissioning and funding arrangements and distribution
 - b. Education leadership
 - c. Procurement, Business development and support
 - d. Borough leadership and governance
 - e. The local authority will continue to monitor and support schools and educational settings regarding free school meal eligibility, applications and take-up.
05. **By July 2023** - London Borough of Hackney should have made initial 'one-off' investment commitments to the locally based organisations: Chef's in Schools and also the Hackney School of Food, to support the implementation of key parts of the supporting action plan for this programme. These targeted one-off investments will lead to ensuring all local schools will have some form of access to activity being led by these organisations as part of the 'local offer' for 2023/2024.
06. To further support the implementation of the recommendations from this report, the London Borough of Hackney, by **September 2023**, will have facilitated a process of inviting 'family of schools' consortia (minimum of one secondary and 4 primary schools per family of schools consortia to encourage cross phase working) to apply for targeted 'one off funding' grant allocations upon expressions of interest, making clear how they will implement recommendations set out in this plan. Grant allocations to be awarded to consortia setting out plans to implement most of the recommendations for schools in this report.

07. **By July 2023** - London Borough of Hackney Procurement should have mapped out the unit cost for local meals across the borough and shared data to inform potential joint working and/or contract renegotiation. Meal unit cost processes vary from £1.65 to just over £3 across local schools with considerable variability in quality.
08. **By September 2023** - London Borough of Hackney should, where there may be any system and process gaps, strengthen arrangements for assisting parents for whom English is a second language by enabling online applications in their native language.
09. **By October 2023**, London Borough of Hackney should have reviewed how improved data sharing processes could be used to automatically enrol children for free school meals in order to increase take up.
10. **By September 2023** - London Borough of Hackney through a commissioned provider arrangement should provide access to readily available school meals based information, guidance and advice for school lead professionals in the form of a telephone line contact and/ or a web-based solution approach.
11. **By December 2023** - London Borough of Hackney should lead on brokerage to enable Schools to partner with local housing estates/residents and cook produce from the housing estates' gardens. Some estates could offer space for local schools to grow food with the children. This should be considered as something to take forward with resident groups.
12. **By October 2023** - London Borough of Hackney should create and distribute printed promotional booklets to reach parents and carers who are not comfortable with online platforms.
13. **By November 2023** - London Borough of Hackney should establish a portal for parents and carers to check their eligibility without completing a full application. Access to this could be given to schools to assist parents.
14. **By September 2023** - actions should be undertaken by Council officers to allow automatic enrolment for free school meals to be introduced and eligibility expanded to include all children who meet the income criteria, regardless of their parents' circumstances. Automatic enrolling of school children who are eligible for free school meals and expanding its criteria were among the recommendations in the National Food Strategy, written by businessman and campaigner Henry Dimbleby,
15. **From September 2023** - potential sponsorship models should be explored. Local partnerships with food projects - collaborative funding could provide more options for schools. Work undertaken locally to develop partnerships in food provision, delivery and collective purchasing. Work could be done to look at the neighbourhood partners, rather than council wide level. If this is too big could schools group in smaller clusters geographically and then lead on making connections with smaller charity organisations. The council could develop a directory to support the connections. There is will and so much out there. However smaller groups would need to develop links with smaller organisations.
16. **By September 2023** - there should be a named Cabinet Member with responsibility for poverty, with oversight of tackling food poverty in education.
17. **By September 2023** - London Borough of Hackney should make available targeted continued professional development activity (CPD) for school business managers with a focus on strengthening skillset to negotiate with contracts/ providers of school meals.

18. **By September 2023** - London Borough of Hackney should make available (through targeted commissioning activity of well positioned local area provider organisations), an extended local offer of CPD to school based professionals and improving access for learning opportunities for more children and young people to develop skills and learning with regards to healthy food and nutrition.
19. **By September 2023** - London Borough of Hackney to lead on activity to enable voluntary sector organisations to act as a hub to support parents in their applications.
20. **By January 2024** - a planning restriction preventing new fast food outlets within 250 metres of schools and education settings should be explored.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION SETTINGS (ADVISORY)

21. Schools and education settings should explore the scope for deploying learning from this report's case studies and where possible foster local working together innovation from clustering or partnership arrangements. Each of the school based case studies in this report demonstrates that local actions and working together can be impactful. A diverse range of interventions are reported, from education and catering staff, working in a wide range of contexts. What is common across these case studies is that when local leaders are motivated to tackle challenges, local solutions are found.
22. Schools may wish to consider how their kitchens are something that communities could use, seeing school kitchens as a community asset and a way for schools, settings and food related organisations to work together.
23. Schools with space could set up a pantry or equivalent. Food based organisations are often looking for a stable arrangement with spaces that can store food. Schools could learn from successful models already operating, for e.g. in the South West. The Food Network can create a simple information sheet on how to get a pantry/ distribution project going. Projects and schools could work more closely together.
24. Schools should think creatively and actively encourage parents to apply for FSM using a variety of initiatives, such as the model used in Newham, where an Ipad is offered a prize. However, previous learning suggests that this approach would be more effective, in Early Years, where there is universality of FSM.
25. Where not already done so schools should support parents with online applications for access to FSM.
26. Schools and settings are encouraged to be different, to be bold, and to be innovative. New approaches can be impactful. An example of successful practice was the 'take-away' van in some schools being strategically located to take pressure off the dining rooms and give more dining options. This innovation also has the benefit of being outdoors and replicating a 'street' dining experience.
27. There is considerable divergence in experience across schools in Hackney. Although it would be

unhelpful to obsess over levels of uptake and 'league table positions', there is merit in reflecting on 'what works' in schools (within their authority and beyond) that find themselves in similar circumstances, and yet seem to report high levels of school meals uptake.

28. Ensure stakeholders are aware of the key role of free school meals in promoting social justice, improving health and tackling poverty. Understanding the contribution of free school meals to Hackney's efforts to eradicate child poverty should be used as a motivation to promote entitlement, tackle the stigma and shame that has been associated with it, and increase uptake.
29. Schools should explore the potential to partner with local housing estates/residents and cook produce from the housing estates' gardens. Some estates could offer space for local schools to grow food with the children. Learning from other LA areas nationally tells us that this approach has been taken forward with resident groups in some areas.
30. Explore the potential to link school meals provision with the school's pre-existing eco-awareness work has the potential to capitalise on pupils' interest in environmental issues.
31. Involving pupils and educating them on the whole process of school food production has the potential to heighten awareness of the quality of school meals and the wider benefits of school meals.
32. Strong leadership locally has proven to be impactful in leading to school meals transformation. The unity of parent groups and staff eases the introduction of new practice.
33. Preventing key stage three pupils from leaving school grounds at lunchtime increases school meal uptake.
34. Maintaining a responsive school meals service – one which listens to pupils and adapts quickly to challenge and change – is key to maintaining success.
35. Upskilling catering staff through targeted CPD activity to enable them to prepare higher quality, fresher homemade meals can prove to be hugely effective.
36. Explore scope for emulating local fast-food chains - in terms of both food style and service layout - where delivered most effectively this has improved the ability to compete.
37. Ensuring pupils are well informed on the importance of healthy eating and fully engaged in the work of the school meals service helps sustain success.
38. Educating teachers on school meals at the start of their careers establishes the importance of school catering for the wider education service.
39. Strengthening the link between eating at home and eating in schools reinforces the value of school food among parents and pupils.
40. Enabling and empowering local Catering Leads has resulted in improved performance for the service as a whole.
41. Parents are more likely to register for free school meals if they have personal help to assist them through the registration process.

42. Social media platforms (Twitter) can be used to sustain interest and to foster links with the wider community and interest groups.
43. Changing the timing of the school's lunch hours, can reduce the attractiveness of visiting high-street fast-food outlets, which can greatly improve school meals uptake.
44. Explore the potential for continuity of dishes offered from primary school at the Secondary School which encourages pupils to use the school meals service.

MEASURING IMPACT

During the 2023/2024 academic year, we will be analysing the Council's key performance data to help us better understand the impact our initiatives are having on tackling food poverty in education. We will include this analysis and future targets related to the recommendations in our action plan. We will also be working in partnership with colleagues from Loughborough University, who will be our programme evaluation partners. An evaluation process will be lead by a team from the University and further information pertaining to process and timescales will be shared in the near future.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Task Group Membership and Associate Members

Organisation	Name
Headteachers	Jenna Clark - Gainsborough Primary School
	Louise Nicholls - Executive Head of Kingsmead, Mandeville and Gayhurst
	Richard Brown - Urswick Secondary School
	Andy English - Our Lady's Catholic Secondary School
Strategic Lead (Hackney Council)	Jenny Zienau
Youth Representatives	Peter Algacs of Hackney Youth Parliament
Chair of Governors	Justin Madubuko (Secondary)
	Shekeila Scarlet (Secondary)
	Saga Wilkinson (Nursery School)
	Punam Mehta (Primary School)
Hackney Council	Sajeed Patni - Head of Finance, Hackney Education
	Ophelia Carter - Head of Schools Finance, Hackney Education
	David Court - Head of Admissions and Pupil Benefits
	Jenny Zienau, Strategic Lead (Change and Transformation), Policy and Strategic Delivery
	Peter Algacs, Engagement, Learning & Prog Team Leader (Hackney Youth Parliament)
	Donna Doherty-Kelly, Principal Public Health Specialist
	Marcela Leite, Community Engagement and Projects Officer
Programme Management	Silvi Shrestha - Programme Manager, Hackney Education
	Laura Oni - Executive Assistant to the Director of Education
	Paul Senior, Director of Education, Hackney Education

Appendix B: Financial implications for free school meals - all schools

This spreadsheet includes costing for all of the settings based on recent census data

Summary (Jan 2022 Census data)				Per meal	£1.50	£2.00	£2.41	£3.00
Nursery Schools	Unfunded Meals	Days			Full take-up	Full take-up	Full take-up	Full take-up
Nursery in a Primary School	Maintained	1,594	190		£454,290	£605,720	£729,893	£908,580
Nursery in a Primary School	Academy	97	190		£27,645	£36,860	£44,416	£55,290
Nursery - standalone	Maintained	213	190		£60,705	£80,940	£97,533	£121,410
		1,904			£542,640	£723,520	£871,842	£1,085,280
Primary Schools (Years 3-6)								
Primary (Years 3-6)	Maintained	4,829	190		£1,376,265			£2,752,530
Primary (Years 3-6)	Academy	890	190		£253,650	£338,200	£407,531	£507,300
		5,719	190		£1,629,915			£3,259,830
Secondary Schools								
Secondary	Maintained	2,721	190		£775,485			£1,550,970
Secondary	Academy	4,304	190		£1,226,640			£2,453,280
		7,025	190		£2,002,125			£4,004,250
Other Provision								
Special	Maintained	126	190		£35,910	£47,880	£57,695	£71,820
PRU	Maintained	47	190		£13,395	£17,860	£21,521	£26,790
AP and Free School	Academy	13	190		£3,705	£4,940	£5,953	£7,410
		186			£53,010	£70,680	£85,169	£106,020
Total		14,834			£4,227,690			£8,455,380

APPENDIX C: HELPFUL RESOURCES

- By region: number of children in poverty not eligible for free school meals - <https://cpag.org.uk/news-blogs/news-listings/region-number-children-poverty-not-eligible-free-school-meals>
- Child poverty in your area – <https://endchildpoverty.org.uk/child-poverty/>
- Circular food (Waste/Carbon) - <https://relondon.gov.uk/circular-food-procurement>
- Trussell Trust (end of year stats) - <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/>
- Trussell Trust (New hunger in UK report) - <https://www.trusselltrust.org/what-we-do/research-advocacy/hunger-in-the-uk/>
- Trussell Trust - <https://www.trusselltrust.org/oxford-university-report/>
- The Broken Plate 2023 - <https://www.foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/broken-plate-2023>
- Updated State of London Report - State of London - London Datastore
- Felix Project Impact Report - https://thefelixproject.org/uploads/files/Felix-Project-Impact-Report-2022_23.pdf
- LACA - UIFSM funding increase ‘nowhere near enough’ says LACA chair | LACA, the school food people
- Research on cost of school - https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/policypost/Minimum_cost_of_education_Final.pdf
- Evaluation of the Free School Meals Pilot (2010) - https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/184047/DFE-RR227.pdf
- Diet-related health inequalities - <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PN-0686/POST-PN-0686.pdf>
- Mental Health in Children - <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2022-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey>
- Relationship between poverty and school absence - <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/118122/pdf/>
- Qualitative insights from young people about the benefits of free school meals - [https://www.biteback2030.com/sites/default/files/2022-09/Bite % 20Back % 202030 % 20- % 20More % 20Than % 20A % 20Meal % 20- % 20Final.pdf](https://www.biteback2030.com/sites/default/files/2022-09/Bite%20Back%202030%20-%20More%20Than%20A%20Meal%20-%20Final.pdf)

Hackney Family Information Service



We offer advice, information and support on:

- local children centres, early years nurseries, pre-schools, childminders
- local schools
- before and after school clubs and holiday playschemes
- childcare funding options

Contact us by:

- Telephone: **020 8820 7000 (option 6)**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm
- Email: **fis@hackneygovuk**
- Visit our social media channels:
Facebook: **facebookcom/hackneyfis**
Instagram: **@hackneyfis**

Hackney Education

Hackney Service Centre
1 Hillman Street, London E8 1DY

020 8820 7000

Our call opening times are as follows:

Monday - 9am to 5pm
Tuesday - 1pm to 5pm
Wednesday - Closed
Thursday - 9am to 1pm
Friday - 9am to 5pm

You can visit us at the Hackney Service Centre at the following times:

Tuesday - 9am to 12pm
Thursday - 1pm to 4pm