
Report To:	Education & Communities Committee	Date:	9 May 2023
Report By:	Ruth Binks Corporate Director, Education, Communities and Organisational Development	Report No:	EDUCOM/32/23/TM
Contact Officer:	Tony McEwan, Head of Culture, Communities and Educational Resources	Contact No:	01475 712828
Subject:	Universal Free School Meals in Primary Schools		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to seek approval by the Education and Communities Committee for the introduction of universal free school meals in primary schools from August 2023.
- 1.3 Currently, all pupils in P1-P5 in Inverclyde are entitled to free school meals and the Council has traditionally been at the forefront of delivery of free school meals to year groups over and above that required by the Scottish Government. In addition, Inverclyde's qualification criteria has also been more generous, leading to more families in Inverclyde being able to access free school meals.
- 1.4 It is the Scottish Government's expectation that all Councils should already be preparing for the introduction of universal free school meal provision in primary schools and has provided Councils with funding to support its introduction by expanding the eligibility criteria to all primary school pupils in receipt of the Child Payment.
- 1.5 The service, in partnership with Property Services, is already making the necessary adjustments to some school kitchens, dining spaces and equipment to accommodate the additional free school meal provision throughout the school session in 2023/24. As a result, the service is confident it can begin the implementation of Universal Free School Meal Provision in Primary Schools from August 2023.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Education and Communities Committee agrees to the early adoption of Universal Free School Meals in Primary Schools from August 2023.

Ruth Binks
Corporate Director, Education, Communities and Organisational Development

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 Inverclyde Council has been providing free school meals for all pupils in Craigmarnloch School and the following age groups in mainstream settings:
- P1-P3 from January 2015 (in line with SG timescale)
 - P4 from August 2019 (SG timescale – Aug 21); and
 - P5 from 2020 (SG timescale Jan 2022).
- 3.2 As part of the Council’s commitment to tackling poverty, the Council has remained ahead of the Scottish Government’s implementation phases and has successfully expanded free school meal provision earlier than required.
- 3.3 In addition, and for several years, the qualifying criteria for free school meals in Inverclyde has been more generous than that recommended by the Scottish Government. This has meant that more families have benefited from free school meals in Inverclyde than would normally have been the case.
- 3.4 The Scottish Government has now indicated that it will provide funding to expand free school meals to P6 – P7 and has asked Councils to expand free school meal entitlement to include P6/7 pupils in receipt of the Child Payment from August 2023. Discussions continue at a national level regarding the delivery of this and the allocation of £50 million capital funding in 2023/24 earmarked for this purpose.

4.0 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The service has been proactive in its preparations for the expansion of free school meals in primary schools and as such it is now in a position to begin the implementation of universal free school meal provision in primary schools from August 2023.
- 4.2 Work has taken place with Property Services to ensure that any capital investment in relation to school kitchen equipment and adaptation will be procured and installed throughout the 2023/24 school session. We are also working with our primary schools to ensure that there is sufficient seating capacity for pupils to accommodate the potential increase in school meal uptake.
- 4.3 Previous implementation of universal free school meal provision over and above those entitled has shown that take up varies but there has not been a significant increase in uptake based on the P1-5 implementations. Given that Inverclyde already has a high percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals and has already implemented a more generous criteria for entitlement, we can expect the increase in numbers attending to have a lesser impact than in some other local authorities. The service is therefore confident it can implement the early adoption of Universal Free School Meals in Primary Schools from August 2023.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO	N/A
Financial	x		
Legal/Risk		x	
Human Resources		x	
Strategic (LOIP/Corporate Plan)	x		
Equalities & Fairer Scotland Duty	x		
Children & Young People’s Rights & Wellbeing	x		
Environmental & Sustainability			x
Data Protection			x

5.2 Finance

2023/24 budget has been increased by £171,000 to allow for reduction in school meals income and increase in provisions spend from August 2023. The increase of £232,000 to arrive at the full year cost is expected to be funded from an increase in grant from the Scottish Government as the national roll-out continues.

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
Education Capital	Various	2023/24	Up to £350k		Capital expenditure to make alterations to existing kitchens and upgrade and purchase additional equipment funded by Scottish Government grant

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (if Applicable)	Other Comments
Primary Schools	Provisions and Income	2023/24	£171k		Funded by Scottish Government grant. The full year cost will be approximately £232k

5.3 Legal/Risk

None.

5.4 Human Resources

It is not anticipated that any increase in meal uptake will not impact on the employee resources required.

5.5 Strategic

The Council is committed to reducing child poverty and universal free school meals in primary schools will help all families reduce cost of living pressures.

5.6 Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty

(a) Equalities

This report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process with the following outcome:

X	YES – Assessed as relevant and an EqIA is required.
	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, assessed as not relevant and no EqIA is required

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

x	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
	NO – Assessed as not relevant under the Fairer Scotland Duty.

5.7 Children and Young People

Has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – Assessed as relevant and a CRWIA is required.
x	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve a new policy, function or strategy or recommends a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy which will have an impact on children's rights.

5.8 Environmental/Sustainability

Summarise any environmental / climate change impacts which relate to this report.

Has a Strategic Environmental Assessment been carried out?

	YES – assessed as relevant and a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required.
x	NO – This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme, strategy or document which is like to have significant environmental effects, if implemented.

5.9 Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – This report involves data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.
x	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 Consultation has taken place with the CMT and all catering managers around the early implementation of the policy.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 N/A.