

Universal Infants Free School Meals briefing paper

Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) will be implemented for children aged 5-7 from September 2014. This policy was announced by the government following the publication of the School Food Plan in autumn 2013. In addition a revised set of food standards for school lunches has currently been consulted upon and is likely to become law in 2015 – though implementation will also begin in Sept 2014.

For details of the plan and the draft standards go to:

<http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/>

The responsibility for the delivery of UIFSM sits with head teachers and governing bodies. Governing bodies are currently responsible for ensuring that their schools meet the mandatory food standards for all food served in schools during the school day (these standards do not apply to academies and free schools).

Clearly, although this policy concerns itself with the provision of food, there are significant and important links to:

- the management of lunchtimes,
- the culture and ethos of the school
- the behaviour of children.
- children's productivity and readiness to learn during the afternoon session

The background.

A Free School Meals pilot operated in three local authorities from the autumn of 2009 to the summer of 2011 (Newham, Durham and Wolverhampton). Two different approaches to extending FSM entitlement were tested as part of the pilot. Newham and Durham piloted a "universal" offer offering all primary pupils a free school meal. In Wolverhampton pupils in both primary and secondary schools whose parents were in receipt of working tax credit with an income of less than £16,000 were offered free school meals. The pilot also included a range of supporting activities in each area to encourage take up of school meals, raise awareness of the pilot and to encourage parents to engage with the pilot. An independent evaluation of the pilot was commissioned.

Impact of the pilot on attainment

The universal pilot had a significant positive impact on attainment at Key Stages 1 & 2 with pupils in the universal pilot areas making between four and eight weeks' more progress than similar pupils in comparison areas. The improvements in attainment in the universal pilot areas appeared to be greater for children from less affluent families and those with lower prior attainment. The universal entitlement pilot had no impact on the amount of time pupils were absent from school which would seem to indicate that improvement in attainment was linked to greater productivity whilst at school.

The challenges of implementation for schools.

Lunchtimes and school meals can already raise strong feelings in schools. UIFSM will mean some schools will have to rethink their lunchtime arrangements and make significant

changes to accommodate increased numbers of young children eating school meals. This may mean more than one sitting, zoning of eating areas, additional staff and mechanisms for supporting young children to choose food such as picture menus.

The challenge for schools is to see this as a positive opportunity to rethink lunchtime arrangements and plan a strategy for their school in order to improve the lunchtime experience for children in the light of Ofsted's expectations and to support improved learning during the afternoon session.

Sir Michael Wilshaw, Chief Inspector of Schools has been quoted on this:

"As a head teacher I always wanted to make sure that my children ate a good school lunch. Not only does a good quality lunch improve a pupil's concentration in the afternoon, but the atmosphere in the canteen is critical to encouraging good behaviour.

More than that, lunch is the only time of day when the whole school – children and teachers – have a chance to come together. The atmosphere of the canteen sets a tone for the rest of the school and helps to establish the school's culture".

Support for schools.

All Norfolk schools will have been audited by Norse to establish what needs to be in place to support this extended delivery. Whilst there is no additional money for capital investment in new kitchens – there is funding to support smaller physical alterations, equipment purchase and staffing.

Norse will be supporting all schools they provide for with this implementation. They will also support other schools through a consultancy service.

The Children's Food Trust is organising a series of roadshows around the country that are free to schools. The East of England one is on 20th May at Ipswich Town Football Club. Their website offers advice and information.

<http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/>

There will be a briefing for school leaders on Thursday June 19th from 2.30-4pm at the Norwich PDC. Places must be booked in advance. To book a place email jenni.barber@norfolk.gov.uk

Headteachers and governors must have a clear strategy for **their** school that has been developed in consultation with their catering provider and their consumers – children and their parents

Heads and Governing bodies should be encouraged to see this as an opportunity to revisit lunchtime arrangement and to make positive changes. It is an opportunity to engage with their stakeholders via focus groups, surveys, question and answer sessions, school/class councils.

For further information contact:

Adele Godsmark School Health Partnerships Adviser, Norfolk Children's Services

Tel: 01603 221812 or adele.godsmark@nhs.net