

Report of the Cabinet Member
Children's Services and Schools

I have been asked to report as follows for Full Council on 25 July 2019:

1. By Councillor Hannaford on:

"In April 2019 the Government offered access to free sanitary products in England's primary schools from early 2020, in addition to secondary schools and the NHS. The Government committed to provide access to free sanitary products in England's secondary schools and colleges in Spring Statement, this was then followed by the Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi confirmed access to the free products will also be fully-funded by the Department for Education in all primary schools across the country.

Extending the programme to all primary schools follows feedback from teachers, students and parents, and the DfE is now working with key stakeholders in the public and private sector to roll-out the programme in a cost-effective manner that supports girls and young women across the country.

Can the Cabinet Member please update council on the preparations and progress being made to ensure that this much needed support is implemented at the earliest opportunity in the Devon County Council are, including academies, faith schools and other organisational models.

2. By Councillor Connett on:

Any arrangements Devon County Council has made to ensure children have at least one proper meal a day during the school holidays.

3. By Councillor Dewhirst on:

Please can the Cabinet Member Children & Schools report on the provision of Free School Meals (FSM) in Devon in the light of the report by Citizens UK that up to £65 million of funding is being diverted away from the provision of Free School Meals.

It is reported that if the student on FSM does not use their allowance by the end of the day - they may be absent from school, attending a lunchtime club or do not use their full credit - then this is retained by the meal provider as "profit" and not rolled over to providing enhanced meals.

4. By Councillor Aves on:

Can the Cabinet Member please update Council on the current and ongoing situation at the South Dartmoor Community College, and the South Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust?

Can the Cabinet Member also give Council assurance that they will make strong representations to the Regional Schools Commissioner to improve communication and transparency, that she will have consultations with all key stakeholders of the Community College and the Primary Schools in the MAT? As the lack of information going out to parents, families and carers is woefully inadequate.

1. Access to Free Sanitary Products

In the spring statement, the Government committed to provide access to free sanitary products in England's secondary schools and colleges. On April 16th 2019 this was followed by confirmation from Children and Families Minister Nadhim Zahawi, that access to the free products would also be fully-funded by the Department for Education (DfE) in all primary schools.

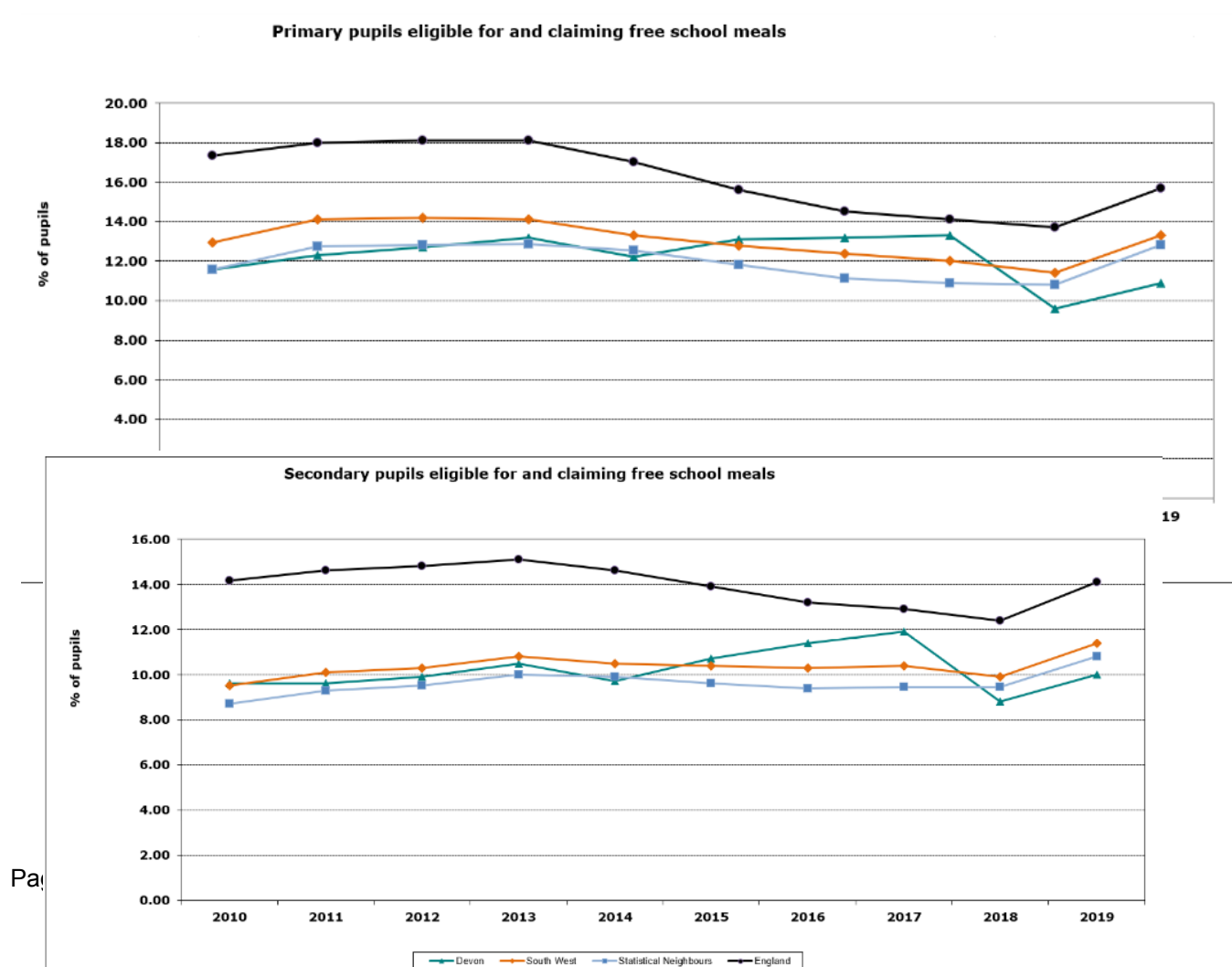
The DfE is now working with key stakeholders in the public and private sector to roll-out the programme in a cost-effective manner. The aim is that free sanitary products will be offered to girls in all primary schools in England from early next year.

Within Devon, our current understanding is that all secondary schools and the majority of primary schools are providing access to free sanitary products when needed. In many cases, but not all, this is delivered through the Red box Project. This is a community-based, not-for-profit initiative, which aims to support young people throughout their periods by providing red boxes filled with free period products to local schools.

2. Any arrangements Devon County Council has made to ensure children have at least one proper meal a day during the school holidays.

The Government have recognised the issue of 'Holiday Hunger' and the Department for Education has allocated £9.1 million to help tackle the problem in some of the most deprived areas of England. There is however, currently no allocation for the Devon County Council footprint.

Devon has a lower number of children eligible for and claiming free school meals than that seen nationally, or within the South West at both secondary and primary school level. The graphs below provide a comparison to England, regional and statistical neighbour numbers.



These statistics do however mask some areas of high deprivation as outlined in the National State of the Nation report.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/662744/State_of_the_Nation_2017_-_Social_Mobility_in_Great_Britain.pdf

Members may be aware that in previous years some counties have worked as communities to develop a way of distributing free meals to children over the holidays. We understand that the Plymouth project is run through the company that provides their Free School Meals (FSM). More information on last year's project can be found here <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2018-08-02/help-for-plymouth-families-facing-holiday-hunger/>.

Whilst recognising the value of the Plymouth project, Devon is faced with a significantly different challenge due to the size of the county and the distribution of pupils on FSM over a large rural area. Whilst a project of the type described above for Plymouth would I am sure be welcome, this would require significant officer time and funding which for Devon is currently not provided through central government funding.

To support those families in need over the summer the Public Health Team collated information on where families could get free or low-cost food onto a searchable webpage. This information and the link below has been widely circulated to schools (via newsletters and the School Communications Website) to all Children's Centres and the Public Health Nursing Service.

<http://www.devonhealthandwellbeing.org.uk/library/schools/food-poverty-and-schools/free-or-low-cost-food-during-summer-holidays-2019/>

More information on the issue of food poverty is also available here:

<http://www.devonhealthandwellbeing.org.uk/jsna/overview/archive/economy/food-poverty/>

3. Free School Meals

Individual schools (Academies or Maintained) are responsible for securing the provision of Free School Meals within their establishments. This means there is a wide range of systems available through which school meals are paid for and delivered. For example:

- Some schools may commission an external provider which may be a commercial company or another school, others have an in-school system (which may also provide to other schools).
- Parents in some schools may pay for meals on a weekly basis (with each day's meals having a set value) others may pay using an online card system where each item has a value which is charged to the card.

All the above mean's that there is no single answer to the question asked and it is up to the schools to ensure that the way the school meals are purchased represents best value and adheres to funding regulations as set out by the DfE.

In Devon the largest provider of primary school meals is Devon Norse. The Norse contracts run on a cost-plus basis, meaning that schools pay the actual cost of the meal provided and retain any profit from the service after a management fee has been paid. Therefore, under Norse contracts if a child

eligible for a free primary school meal doesn't take the meal for any reason the caterer doesn't directly benefit.

There are a high number of large commercial catering organisations operating secondary school catering across Devon. Devon Norse only operate in two secondary schools. At both of these schools, one operates an online payment system and the other a cash payment system. Each day students eligible for free school meals receive an available credit of £2.20, if this is not used or partly used then any remaining credit balance is lost and the following day a new £2.20 credit is available. No credit rolls over day to day.

It should be noted that whilst the above graphs shown in question 1 relate to the number of children entitled to free school meals funding provided to schools from within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) it is based on formula funding and not on the number of meals being purchased.

4. Update on South Dartmoor Community College and the South Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust

South Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust has recently appointed experienced interim executive leaders, Angela Barry and Lee Miller. Both Ms Barry (as Interim Executive Support) and Mr Miller (as Interim Chief Operating Officer) are working alongside the CEO, the Trustees, South Dartmoor Community College (SDCC) and the six other schools in the Trust to drive strategic direction and ensure stability and sound financial management.

Following the outcome of the consultation on the proposed restructure, a letter to parents and Governors was shared on 12th June to confirm that no compulsory redundancies were made among teachers. Across the Trust, five teachers opted to take voluntary redundancy. Regrettably, a number of support staff were also made redundant, the vast majority voluntarily.

Over the past few months the Trust has been working closely with the Education and Skills Funding Agency to address the areas outlined in the Financial Notice to Improve. An action plan is being implemented which includes developing a robust and sustainable financial plan. The school report they are already making good progress with this.

On Tuesday 18th June, school leaders held a meeting with a number of parents who are working together to support the academy. This meeting allowed the school to understand some of the concerns and subsequently provided a letter to parents which answered some key questions (see attached).

A further letter was sent to SDCC parents on Friday 12th July confirming that Paul Collins, the Principal of SDCC, who has been away from the school in recent weeks for health reasons, would not be able to return and so has stepped down.

The same letter also announced that through the Ivybridge Teaching School's application to the Department for Education for a school improvement grant, SDCC would be welcoming Kevin Dyke from 1st September as the Interim Principal. Mr Dyke has made numerous visits to the school over the past couple of weeks in readiness for taking up his new position.

At present, the Trust's leadership team is working closely with the Office of the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) for the South West to help find a suitable partner for the schools within South Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust, including SDCC. The Trust had initially consulted on a partnership with Education South West (ESW) for additional support, but this will no longer be taken forward. The RSC has an overview of all the Trusts which may be able to provide the additional support and expertise required and will use this to inform next steps.

The school are clear that the experience and expertise in the leadership of the Trust, at both executive and board level, working with the RSC will ensure that they can move forward positively and that the schools in the Trust are safeguarded for the good of the children and young people they educate.

Representations to the Regional Schools Commissioner to improve communication and transparency.

The Local Authority (LA) is in communication with the RSC about a variety of schools and always emphasises the importance of regular open and transparent communication with parents and other stakeholders. As with all things, there are sometimes processes (e.g. redundancy) which need to be completed before parents can be informed of next steps.

As from the Autumn, regular face to face meetings have been arranged between the LA and the RSC office to ensure a close join up regarding existing and new schools.

James McInnes

Cabinet Member

Children's Services and Schools