

Support for Children and Families during the Pandemic Report of the Chief Officer for Children's Services

Background

Recent national debates about Free School Meals (FSM) prompted the Childrens O&S Committee to seek clarification about Devon County Council's response. This briefing note summarises the response to vulnerable children in different phases of the pandemic, including the response now. The briefing includes data on FSM which show a very significant rise in demand.

Phase One Lockdown

At Easter 2020, the role of schools changed to supporting vulnerable children and the children of key workers, with the vast majority of children receiving their education at home. Being in receipt of FSM did not in itself meet the criteria for vulnerability so most children, normally in receipt of FSM, were not in school. Throughout the Spring and Summer the DfE issued comprehensive guidance on the actions schools should take and opened a funding window to allow schools to claim back Covid related expenses such as those incurred for cleaning or equipment. This money was paid directly to schools.

For the May half term and the summer holidays the DfE agreed that schools could continue to provide meals for entitled children. Schools met this requirement through a variety of routes, some made use of the national voucher system while others provided food parcels that families could collect or purchased gift vouchers for local stores. Staff, who are not employed during the holidays agreed to work, some unpaid, so that the service could be provided. Funding windows were opened which allowed schools to submit claims for the cost of the meal or vouchers (max £3 per head). Once again payments for these claims were made directly to schools.

As Devon is large rural county, the County Council believed that local solutions were needed to ensure that in lockdown the most vulnerable people in Devon including children and families did not go hungry. To ensure support was available Devon County Council allocated £1 million to a shared hardship fund. This funding was shared between districts along with a further £700,000 from the government (Devon's share of the £63m national allocation). The district councils have used the money in different ways to best help their local communities. For example, some have funded the voluntary sector and others have issued vouchers or provided food directly. Around £600,000 of the original allocation is still available and [anyone who needs help providing food for their children is encouraged to apply for this extra assistance through their district council's helpline.](#) The County Council is holding a further £100,000 in reserve for additional hardship funding over the winter.

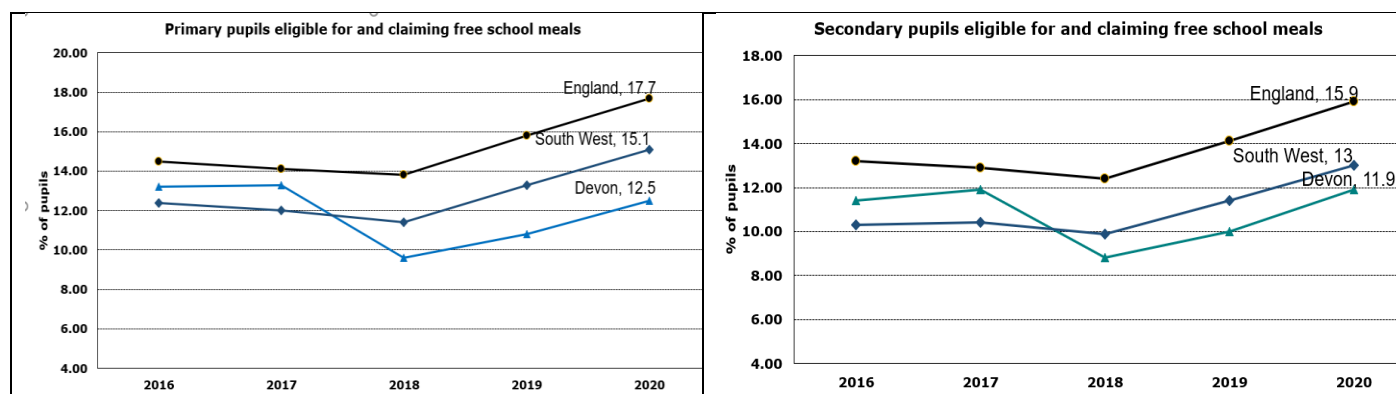
Wider return to school in September

The wider return to school in September, has gone very well and an average of 92% of pupils are attending (national average 87%). Schools are under intense pressure to follow the Covid safe guidelines, deliver a full curriculum in school and provide remote learning (on-line and paper-based if needed) for pupils who are self-isolating. Just before half term there were 287 teachers self-isolating, which has put pressure on school budgets as, on top of the Covid safe requirements they are also facing supply teaching costs.

The DfE have, to date, remained firm that there will be no additional funding for schools to cover Covid costs this term. Additionally, they have confirmed that there will be no holiday FSM funding. It is important to note however that, even if FSM funding was provided, schools would be unlikely to have the capacity to discharge the responsibility. The capacity that was available in schools in the Spring and Summer is now fully committed.

Data on FSM

Before the pandemic the percentage of pupils eligible for and claiming FSM was rising in Devon and nationally. Devon's percentage remains significantly below that seen nationally. The graphs below chart show how Devon compares to the England and South West percentages for primary and secondary aged pupils.



Covid has had a significant impact of the number of families that have registered free school meals. The table below shows the increase in claims since March.

Authorised claims	March /April	June/ July	Aug/ sept
2019	206	572	771
2020	1257	1816	1,130

Based on the October 2020 census there are now 13,830 pupils claiming FSM in Devon. This figure could still rise as the census is not yet closed. At £3 per meal, it would cost about £41,940 per day to provide a meal to these children.

The below table shows the number and percentage of children entitled to free school meals and how they are split across the county. The current figures are based on the October 2020 census to date, please note the census is not yet closed so these figures could still rise. Spring census data is provided for comparison purposes. Electoral division information is provided in Appendix 1.

Devon District	Autumn 2020 school census (October 2020)				Spring Census % for comparison
	number of schools	Number of pupils eligible for FSM	total number of pupils on roll	% of pupils on roll eligible for FSM	
East Devon	63	2308	18398	13%	11%
Exeter	40	2285	13768	17%	14%
Mid Devon	40	1541	10578	15%	13%
North Devon	57	2353	14129	17%	14%
South Hams	46	1318	11362	12%	10%

Teignbridge	57	2411	16115	15%	13%
Torridge	34	1397	7787	18%	16%
West Devon	31	928	6575	14%	12%
Plymouth	1	24	201	12%	11%
Grand Total	369	14565	98913	15%	13%

Next Steps

District Councils have circa £600,000 remaining hardship allocation and the Council has set aside a further £100,000 for Winter hardship. Families, entitled to FSM, whose children would otherwise go hungry, are encouraged to contact their District Council in order to access hardship assistance during the school holidays.

The County Council will write to the Government to clarify that, due to our financial position, we are limited in our ability to provide financial support for families beyond the Spring and to request that they properly fund support for all vulnerable people in Devon affected by the financial impacts of the pandemic.

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Electoral Divisions: All

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	Autumn 2020 school census (01/10/20)				
School electoral division	number of schools	Number of pupils eligible for FSM	total number of pupils on roll	% of pupils on roll eligible for FSM	Spring Census % for comparison
Alphington and Cowick	5	285	1925	15%	12%
Ashburton and Buckfastleigh	8	263	2121	12%	11%
Axminster	7	236	1299	18%	16%
Barnstaple North	7	569	2394	24%	22%
Barnstaple South	6	580	2980	19%	16%
Bickleigh and Wembury	6	79	905	9%	6%
Bideford East	2	125	563	22%	21%
Bideford West and Hartland	7	476	2579	18%	18%
Bovey Rural	5	81	847	10%	9%
Braunton Rural	5	167	1856	9%	7%
Broadclyst	11	450	3469	13%	11%
Chudleigh and Teign Valley	8	123	1025	12%	10%
Chulmleigh and Landkey	9	140	1585	9%	8%
Combe Martin Rural	11	123	1099	11%	9%
Crediton	7	352	2425	15%	13%
Creedy, Taw and Mid Exe	8	86	870	10%	10%
Cullompton and Bradninch	5	231	1730	13%	13%
Dartmouth and Marldon	6	145	940	15%	12%
Dawlish	5	327	1517	22%	19%
Duryard and Pennsylvania	3	130	934	14%	11%
Exminster and Haldon	5	99	957	10%	8%
Exmouth	10	664	4871	14%	10%
Exmouth and Budleigh Salterton Coastal	3	126	627	20%	13%
Exwick and St Thomas	5	320	1783	18%	16%
Feniton and Honiton	4	234	1814	13%	12%
Fremington Rural	5	103	762	14%	12%
Hatherleigh and Chagford	8	105	876	12%	10%
Heavitree and Whipton Barton	5	256	1171	22%	20%
Holsworthy Rural	12	319	1561	20%	17%
Ilfracombe	3	399	1801	22%	18%
Ipplepen and The Kerswells	5	103	970	11%	9%
Ivybridge	5	371	3682	10%	9%
Kingsbridge	7	216	2289	9%	8%
Kingsteignton and Teign Estuary	5	269	2278	12%	10%
Newton Abbot North	9	690	3785	18%	16%
Newton Abbot South	3	125	683	18%	14%
Northam	4	153	1104	14%	11%
Okehampton Rural	9	362	2590	14%	12%
Otter Valley	7	198	2230	9%	8%
Pinhoe and Mincinglake	5	558	2892	19%	16%
Plymstock Dunstone	1	24	201	12%	11%
Salcombe	7	62	721	9%	8%
Seaton and Colyton	7	127	1738	7%	7%

School electoral division	number of schools	Number of pupils eligible for FSM	total number of pupils on roll	% of pupils on roll eligible for FSM	Spring Census % for comparison
Sidmouth	3	204	1448	14%	12%
South Brent and Yealmpton	7	86	822	10%	8%
South Molton	11	272	1652	16%	13%
St Davids and Haven Banks	3	80	811	10%	7%
St Sidwells and St James	4	98	1019	10%	8%
Tavistock	6	344	2263	15%	12%
Teignmouth	4	331	1932	17%	15%
Tiverton East	5	168	929	18%	15%
Tiverton West	7	481	2318	21%	17%
Torrington Rural	9	324	1980	16%	13%
Totnes and Dartington	8	359	2003	18%	17%
Wearside and Topsham	4	160	878	18%	16%
Whimble and Blackdown	11	69	902	8%	7%
Willand and Uffculme	8	223	2306	10%	8%
Wonford and St Loyes	6	398	2355	17%	14%
Yelverton Rural	8	117	846	14%	11%
Grand Total	369	14565	98913	15%	13%