

WIRRAL COUNCIL

WIRRAL SCHOOLS FORUM – 13 JANUARY 2016

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

MAXIMISING FREE SCHOOL MEALS TAKE UP IN WIRRAL – “OPT OUT” PROJECT OUTCOMES

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report sets out the outcomes from the Free School Meals “Opt Out” Project.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Transaction Centre Officers attended Wirral Schools Forum on 20.10.15 to request funding towards staffing costs for administering the Free School Meals maximisation project, known as the “Opt Out” scheme.

2.2 Wirral Schools Forum awarded £10k towards the costs of the project.

2.3 The Opt Out scheme’s objective was to maximise Free School Meals awards, attracting additional pupil premium funding in the January 2016 school census and in all future data collections.

2.4 This project involved pro-actively contacting parents of school aged children to offer Free School Meal awards with the parent not having to complete an application form, but in effect applying by a negative inference. The parent’s income details having already been checked to meet the qualifying criteria for eligibility for Free School Meals. This data was available from existing Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support applicants and was accessible for other uses via data share agreements when the applicants initially applied to Wirral Council Benefits Team.

2.5 The initial project was completed by the end of December 2015, parents and schools were notified of the outcomes.

3. OUTCOME

3.1 585 household were contacted , with 916 pupils considered (up to age 18 years)

3.2 Awards were made as follows

| Age range | Number of new awards | Pupil Premium funding per head | Estimated total pupil funding from project |
|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Primary | 459 | £1320 | £605,880 |
| Secondary | 128 | £935 | £119,680 |
| 6 th Form | 18 | nil | nil |
| Total | 605 | | £725,560 |

- 3.3 It is estimated 79 pupils had previously been awarded Free School Meals in the preceding 6 years and would have attracted the pupil premium funding in January 2016 anyway via the “ever 6” process.
- 3.4 During this period 150 pupils have also been awarded Free School Meals, their parents having been prompted by the Opt Out contact to make an immediate on-line application.
- 3.5 Only 9 parents opted out of the process and declined to have awards for their children.
- 3.6. The process also identified children who were fostered, home schooled, schooled out of area, privately schooled, 16+ years pupils no longer in education and those with parents who were no longer eligible. Awards were not appropriate in these circumstances, although some are likely to remain as part of ever 6 data.
- 3.7 Over the period other FSM numbers, those outside the opt out initiative, have reduced. Prior to each census date a full eligibility check is made of the Free School Meal case load. This is done by bulk checking all claims via the Department for Educations automatic on line eligibility checker and ensures ongoing eligibility. This detailed check identifies those cases which have to ended for Free School Meals eligibility and in turn removes the pupils from current access to a free meal. However importantly these pupils will retain their eligibility for the pupil premium via “ever 6”. Volumes of pupils entitled to Free School Meals alter on a daily basis as parents move in and out of work and their wider circumstances alter.
- 4.3 Wirral Benefits Team have recently introduced a real time on–line Free School Meal checking facility for all schools which will assist those who administer the Free school Meals process and the collation of census data.

4. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1. The report be noted
- 4.2. The Forum endorses the ongoing work to maximise FSM take up in schools.

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