

EDUCATION PDS COMMITTEE
29th September 2015

WRITTEN QUESTIONS TO THE EDUCATION PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Written Question to the Education Portfolio Holder received from Ms Susan Sulis, Secretary, Community Care Protection Group

With regard to the introduction of Free Infant School Meals and Loss of Pupil Premium Funding:

- a) Since the introduction of this scheme, have fewer Bromley parents registered their children for Free School Meals?

Reply:

Between June 2014 and June 2015, there has been a reduction of 154 pupils registered for Free School Meals, from 9225 to 9071, a reduction of 1.7%.

- b) Consequently, have schools lost out on vital Pupil Premium funding?

Reply:

Yes, it is assumed that some schools have missed out on pupil premium funding although this has been mitigated slightly by an increase in the rate paid per child.

- c) If so, how much has been lost?

Reply:

Overall allocation (excluding dedicated pupil premium funding for LAC, post-LAC and service children) has reduced by £103,800; from £10,579,483 in June 2014 to £10,475,603 in June 2015. If the per-pupil rate had remained at 14/15 levels, the allocation would have reduced by £207,500.

- d) What can Bromley do to mitigate this situation? (eg by using existing Benefit records)

Reply:

The London Borough of Bromley continues to provide a Free School Meals/Pupil Premium Eligibility Service in which officers undertake eligibility checking for parents and pupils attending Bromley schools, using Department for Works and Pensions data available to local authorities. Guidance provided last year also stated that only local authorities can access this data via the Government Free Meals Checking Service. The service provided to schools by the Council is available free to maintained schools and at a small cost to Academies and Free Schools.

This is a simpler process than the school undertaking an eligibility check themselves as the vast majority of parents will only need to submit basic information about themselves, rather than producing more detailed documentary

evidence. However, it is dependent upon the parent submitting an application form for eligibility checking and the authority relies on schools to make parents aware of this and to encourage application. The Local Authority cannot blanket check eligibility for Free School Meals as it relies on individual parental approval to access their personal data.

In December 2014 the Council sent schools a circular asking them to encourage any parent of a pupil who might be eligible and who hadn't applied already, to apply for a Free School Meal in advance of the January 2015 school census. Eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) is based on the Ever 6 rule which means that pupils recorded on the January 2015 School Census as known to be eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) or on any of the termly censuses for the past 6 years (since Summer 2009) will attract Pupil Premium.