

County Council – 6 November 2020

Item 9(e) - Notice of Motion by Cllr Michael Jones

Milk at School Break Time – Briefing Note

Background and Overview

At the January 2020 schools census, there were 11,469 free school meal eligible children in West Sussex who qualify for free school meals (FSM), around 10% of the total school roll. Whilst we are awaiting the Department for Education to verify the October 2020 schools census, we do know that we have processed around 6,000 FSM applications since January, with an additional 3,500 children approximately qualifying for FSM. It is therefore likely that the FSM number in West Sussex is currently around 15,000. As part of that FSM pupils are provided with the option of milk or water to have with their daily meal, in line with the Government's School Food Standards 2014. In addition, until September 2020 in primary phase schools, funded through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), all pupils qualifying for a free school meal could also receive a drink of milk at morning break.

The DSG is a direct grant provided by the Government and decisions on its use are considered by the Schools Forum, a group of representatives from schools, academies and early years providers. The DSG is split into different elements including the funding of school budgets (Schools Block), the funding of Special Needs (High Needs Block), and the funding of additional education and school related costs (Central Schools Services Block).

Funding for historical commitments including Early Help and children's social care projects, bikeability, non-statutory school milk provision and school-to-school improvement was cash frozen as part of the Central Schools Service Block DSG allocation from 2013 but, in 2020/21, was reduced by 20% as part of the move towards a national funding formula. Due to this reduction in funding, £1m of savings had to be found and the difficult decision to remove the funding for morning break milk for eligible pupils aged five and over was taken. Free break time milk for eligible pupils under five still remains in place as this is a statutory provision.

Schools receive their own Pupil Premium Group funding to support children who are disadvantaged. This funding is closely aligned to pupils who qualify for free school meals. The funding can be, and is, used by schools for a variety of purposes to support children who are disadvantaged. Ofsted surveyed its use across a number of schools in 2012 and reported on a wide range of uses to meet pupils' health, wellbeing and achievement.

Whilst Central Schools Services DSG Block funding is no longer available to fund milk, schools do have the flexibility to use their existing funding for disadvantaged pupils to provide the additional drink of milk if they wish. The provision of school milk is not and has never been a Council-funded service.

Paul Wagstaff

Director of Education and Skills