

Committee	Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report	Free School Meals Project
Date of meeting	8 December 2022
Relevant Officer	Owen Owens, Senior Manager, Education Resources Service
Relevant Cabinet Member	Councillor Beca Brown

1. Background

- 1.1. In December 2021 Jeremy Miles MS, Welsh Government Minister for the Welsh Language and Education, announced that £25m of capital funding would be invested in kitchen and dining infrastructure in Welsh schools as part of plans to introduce free school meals to all primary school children in Wales over the next three years. The policy is part of the co-operation agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru. A grant letter was received in February 2022 allocating £1,121,603 of capital funding to fulfil the requirement to extend the right to free school meals to all primary schools in Gwynedd, to be spent by 31 March 2022.
- 1.2. In August 2022, the Minister for the Welsh Language and Education approved an additional £35 million of capital funding to support the work, with a further allocation of £1,570,244 available to Gwynedd.

2. Update

- 2.1. Following the original announcement, kitchens and dining spaces in all primary schools in Gwynedd were inspected in order to identify which kitchens required upgrading of their large appliances such as ovens and dishwashers as well as lighter apparatus.
- 2.2. We gathered parents' opinions to see how many intended to take advantage of the scheme so that we had an overview before making adaptations to our infrastructure.
- 2.3. In terms of the large appliances, 28 new combi-ovens and 17 dishwashers have been installed, with more to be installed before Christmas and early in the new year.
- 2.4. It became clear that several sites would need an extension to cope with the possible increase in the numbers who would be eating a hot meal, as either the kitchen or dining space were unsuitable or too small. The following schools received an extension over the summer holidays / October half term:
 - Ysgol Hendre
 - Ysgol Bethel
 - Ysgol Bro Lleu
 - Ysgol Maenofferen
- 2.5. We have reviewed which schools are able to provide dinner to all their pupils as the situation stands at present, should there be political desire for this to happen in light of the cost-of-living crisis we are facing. At present, 69% of our sites have the capacity to provide dinner to everyone by January 2023. Please see **Appendix A**, a list of the schools that are able / unable to offer hot meals to everyone.
- 2.6. Here are the main reasons why not all schools are currently in a position to be able to provide dinner to everyone:
 - The combi oven / large appliances have not arrived
 - Need to appoint new kitchen staff
 - Need to increase the hours of kitchen staff
 - Extensions to the dining space / kitchen have not been completed

3. Next Steps

- 3.1. We will need to install the remainder of the large appliances that are on order over the coming weeks, subject to the schedule for receiving the equipment and completing the preparation work on site.
- 3.2. Extensions to be completed:
 - a) Ysgol Llanrug – an extension to the hall (dining space). This will be done as part of a Phase 2 Condition and Suitability project. The work is expected to be completed by January 2023.
 - b) Ysgol y Gelli – extension to the canteen. Foundations have been completed, expecting completion of the work by March 2023.
 - c) Ysgol Waunfawr – a planning application has been submitted and we will need to go out to tender over the coming weeks.
 - d) Ysgol Chwilog – due to additional funding from WG, an extension will be built to the dining space. The plan has been prepared and a planning application will need to be submitted.
 - e) Ysgol Felinheli – due to additional funding from WG, an extension will be built to the dining space. In the process of preparing a plan, and a planning application will need to be submitted.

4. Benefits of the Scheme

Since September 2022, here is an overview of the eligible numbers who have taken up the free school meals offer (weekly average). ***The data below does not currently include Special Schools or Lifelong Schools.***

Month	Number of Reception and Year 1 pupils	Number of pupils choosing free school meals – UPFSM	Number of pupils choosing free school meals – EFSM	% of pupils taking free school meals under both schemes
September	2243	1305	271	70%
October	2257	1227	257	66%

By rolling out the free school meals scheme to all primary school children in Gwynedd, it will help to contribute towards:

- addressing poverty / the problem of children going hungry
- ensuring the well-being of future generations and reducing inequality
- removing stigma
- healthy eating habits and attitudes.

5. Risks

- a) The timeframe between receiving the combi ovens and dishwashers and installing them before the end of March 2023 is very tight.
- b) Failing to spend the additional grant before the end of the financial year. *Nevertheless, the grant conditions do state that spending may be slipped to summer 2023 in some circumstances.*
- c) Inadequate power supply in some of our schools causing a delay in ordering goods. We are still awaiting confirmation from Scottish Power for some sites.
- d) The Council's electricity providers are very slow updating the electricity meter. A further barrier to installing equipment in some schools.
- e) An additional revenue cost in meeting the need for more staff during lunch-time.
- f) Recruitment of additional staff (this is currently challenging)
- g) Additional food costs – food costs have risen recently

6. Timetable

- 6.1. Since September 2022, some of the youngest children in Gwynedd primary schools, namely Reception and Year 1 pupils, have been receiving free school meals as the policy is introduced gradually. The aim is to extend the offer to Year 2 by January 2023, and then to Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 by September 2023.

School Year	Timetable for Providing Free School Meals
Reception Year	September 2022
Year 1	September 2022
Year 2	January 2023
Years 3, 4, 5 and 6	September 2023

7. Secondary

- 7.1. The Catering Team have not done specific work to assess kitchens or dining spaces in the secondary sector. The work programme to provide free meals in the primary sector is ambitious, and this will be the Education Department's priority for the coming months in order to ensure that all children in all primary schools will have free school meals by September 2023.
- 7.2. There is currently no capacity or funding to specifically address the secondary sector. Should the Welsh Government announce a review of the situation, the Education Department would welcome the scheme.

Appendix A – A List of Schools and their ability to provide dinner to the whole school by January 2023

61 (69%) sites out of our 88 sites are able to provide for everyone by January 2023.

School	The ability to feed every year by January 2023
Gwaun Gynfi	No
Nefyn	No
Llanrug	No
Abererch	No
Beddgelert	✓
Bethel	No
Bodfeurig	✓
Borthygest	✓
Brynaerau	No
Y Gelli	No
Penybryn	✓
Treferthyr	No
Chwilog	No
Crud y Werin	✓
Dolbadarn	No
Edern	✓
Felinwnda	NO KITCHEN
Bro Plenydd	No
Garndolbenmaen	✓
Llanbedrog	No
Llangybi	✓
Llanllechid	No
Llanllyfni	No
Morfa Nefyn	NO KITCHEN
Baladeulyn	✓
Nebo	✓ DELIVER
Penisarwaen	✓
Bro Lleu	No
Pentreuchaf	✓
Rhiwlas	✓
Rhosgadfan	✓
Rhostryfan	No
Sarn Bach	✓
Eifion Wyn	✓
Talysarn	No
Y Gorlan	No
Yr Eifl	✓
Tudweiliog	✓
Waunfawr	No
Glancegin	✓
Yr Hendre	No

Bontnewydd	No
Y Garnedd	✓
Cymerau	No
Abercaseg	No
Y Felinheli	✓
Y Traeth	✓
Dyffryn Dulas	✓
Dyffryn Ardudwy	✓
Bro Cynfal	✓
Edmwnd Prys	✓
Llanbedr	✓
Y Garreg	✓
O. M. Edwards	✓
Manod	✓
Pennal	✓
Cefn Coch	✓
Talsarnau	✓
Tanygrisiau	✓
Penybryn, Tywyn	No
Bro Hedd Wyn	✓
Bro Tryweryn	✓
Tan y Castell	✓
Ffridd y Llyn	No
Maenofferen	✓
Hirael	No
Craig y Deryn	✓
Bro Llifon	✓
Pont y Gôf	✓
Maesincla	✓
Y Faenol	✓
Foel Gron	✓
Llandygai	✓
Llandwrog	✓
Llanystumdwy	✓
Tregarth	✓
Cae Top	✓
Santes Helen	✓
Our Lady	✓
BRO IDRIS MAIN SITE	✓
Bro Idris PRIMARY	No
DINAS MAWDDWY	✓
FRIOG	✓
RHYDYMAIN	✓
LLANELLYD	✓
Godre'r Berwyn	✓
Ysgol Pendalar	✓
Ysgol Hafod Lon	✓