



Report of the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning

Education Scrutiny Performance Panel 14 November 2024

Strategy for Poverty Proofing the School Day Given the Cost-of-Living Crisis

Purpose:	To brief the Scrutiny Panel on the Education Directorate's strategy for poverty proofing the school day, given the cost-of-living crisis
Content:	An overview of support provided to schools and families to reduce disadvantage
Councillors are being asked to:	Consider the information provided and give views
Lead Councillor:	Councillor Robert Smith Cabinet Member for Education and Learning
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For Information	

1. Background

- 1.1 The City and County of Swansea's Corporate Plan 2023-2028 sets out wellbeing objectives including:
 - Improving Education and Skills - so that everyone in Swansea gains the skills and qualifications they need to succeed in life
 - Tackling Poverty and Enabling Communities - so that every person in Swansea can achieve their potential
- 1.2 The Education Directorate supports schools in their role to help ensure children and young people's needs are met by creating the right conditions for them to thrive now and prosper in the future.
- 1.3 In the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) 2019, 17 (11.5%) of Swansea's 148 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs - areas with an average population of 1,600) are in the most deprived 10 per cent in Wales.

- 1.4 The percentage of children on roll in Swansea schools that were eligible for free school meals (FSM) in January 2024 varied from 2.09% to 69.78% in primary schools, and from 5.61% to 51.0% in secondary schools.
- 1.5 The Education Directorate aims to raise the attainment of children and young people from low-income households by reducing the barriers that they often face to achieving their full potential. This report outlines some of these areas, namely:
- Pupil Development Grant (PDG)
 - The rollout of free school meals
 - The cost of the school day
 - School uniform

2. Pupil Development Grant (PDG)

- 2.1 PDG is grant funding provided by the Welsh Government to schools and settings for children and young people aged 5 to 15 who are eligible for FSM. Grant is based on £1,150 per learner with FSM eligibility (note that this excludes children only receiving universal FSM). Use of the grant should focus on the following key areas:
- high-quality learning and teaching
 - Community Focused Schools
 - early childhood play, learning and care
 - high aspirations supported by strong relationships
 - health and wellbeing
 - leadership
 - Curriculum for Wales and qualifications
 - supporting post-16 progression
- 2.2 In May 2019, the Policy Development Committee supported recommendations regarding PDG use in Swansea. These included:
- Appoint a senior leader within the school to champion pupils who are eligible for FSM with responsibility for the strategic implementation of PDG
 - Optimise the progress of MAT (more able and talented) pupils eligible for FSM through more targeted and effective use of the PDG for this group of pupils
 - Establish a PDG plan clearly identifying eligible pupils and demonstrate/evaluate the actions/activities to support them
 - Undertake regular tracking of the academic progress of this group of pupils
 - Include the provision and evaluation of the activities/resources used to support the learning of Looked After Children (LAC) FSM pupils where appropriate
 - Undertake an annual review of intervention strategies to be evidenced and undertaken by the leadership team - interventions that are selected to be implemented should be based on sound research and evidence

- 2.3 School Improvement Advisers from the Education Directorate consider school PDG plans as part of their autumn term support visits and discuss how schools are supporting the recommendations from paragraph 2.2.
- 2.4 Schools also have access to a flowchart to consider if spend is eligible in line with the grant terms and conditions (see Appendix A).
- 2.5 A summary of PDG allocations to schools for the financial year 2024-2025 is shown in the table below.

	Max	Min	Avg	Total
Primary	£319,192	£5,793	£82,665	£6,365,167
Secondary	£474,725	£71,963	£250,786	£3,316,101
Special	£64,999	£20,893	£42,946	£85,892
PRU/EOTAS	£80,500	£80,500	£80,500	£80,500
				£9,847,660

The amount of PDG received by schools can vary greatly, depending on the number of pupils eligible for FSM.

Note that £350k of 'smoothing' grant was also received so that no school lost funding from the previous year, and the surplus funding was shared pro rata amongst schools.

- 2.6 Some interventions are more successful than others and the best approaches are not always the most expensive. What should be consistent is that the approaches are research and evidence based. Some examples of use in Swansea that meet the needs of learners are:
- Purchase of support packages (reading eggs, maths seeds, toe-by-toe etc.)
 - self-esteem (THRIVE, Empathy Lab etc.)
 - supporting mental health
 - Developing tracking systems
 - Freeing key staff to work with families and other agencies (TAF)
 - Employing staff to support families
 - Implement catch-up programmes
 - Increase staffing ratios in the early years
 - Provide enrichment and after-school provision
 - Homework club for parents and pupils
 - Computer skills course for parents
 - Creation of wellbeing rooms
 - Supporting MAT pupils
 - Nurture lunchtime clubs
 - Art therapy

2.7 Training packages are also delivered to staff (teachers and teaching assistants), such as:

- Speech and language
- Well-being training
- Wellcomm
- Developing teaching, e.g. Hattie's 'visible learning'
- Trauma informed
- Behaviour strategies
- Attachment

2.8 Families can also be supported directly, for example:

- Free pre-school childcare clubs
- Free after-school club
- Free/subsidised school trips
- Free school snacks
- Provision of IT equipment

2.9 The impact of PDG can be seen through improved engagement, fewer social services referrals, improved attendance, improved attainment and importantly a better relationship between parents and the school.

3. The rollout of universal free school meals

3.1 The Welsh Government asked local authorities to roll out universal free school meals for primary pupils by 2024. This commitment was in response to the rising cost-of-living pressures on families and ambitions to:

- tackle child poverty
- ensure no child goes hungry in school
- promote healthy eating across the school
- increase the variety of food options
- improve social skills at mealtimes
- improve behaviour and attainment

3.2 Swansea Council agreed to roll out the free meal a whole year group at a time, to ensure fairness across the county. From September 2024, all full-time pupils up to and including Year 6 in primary schools are receiving a free meal.

3.3 To accommodate the increasing number of pupils whilst working within the grant provided, changes have been made to the menu on offer in primary schools. Less labour-intensive menu choices are being offered whilst still ensuring that a healthy and nutritious meal is being served.

3.4 Some school kitchens required new equipment to enable them to produce more meals, and this was purchased and installed using a grant from the Welsh Government. Some schools also required upgrades to their electrical systems to enable the new equipment to be

installed. Some of these projects delayed the rollout of universal free school meals as they had to be completed in all schools to allow us to roll out to the whole year group at the same time.

- 3.5 Five schools remain with major capital works required, and these will be completed as soon as possible and by the end of 2025. Our catering service are using alternative solutions to be able to deliver meals to all learners in these five schools until the capital works are completed.
- 3.6 To date, the Welsh Government has allocated £7.2m of capital funding to support equipment and building work in Swansea schools. Additional meals provided are supported by revenue grant, which has been increased to £3.20 per meal.
- 3.7 Take up of the universal free school meal offer is increasing and ranged between 35% and 91% in June 2024, with an average uptake of 66%. Catering officers continue to investigate where there are low levels of take up to encourage an increase.
- 3.8 It should be noted that the directorate is continually reminding parents and carers to apply for free school meal eligibility, even though they will get a free meal without applying, as otherwise they cannot claim for school uniform grant if eligible, and also the school and council will lose out on funding that is based on FSM numbers, in particular PDG.

4. The cost of the school day

- 4.1 Schools are frequently reminded to consider the cost of the school day for parents and carers. A conference on the poverty agenda was run for school leaders in Swansea on 23 May 2024 that outlined good practice, provided information on available support and resources, and also reminded schools to pay heed to the Welsh Government's *School uniform and appearance: policy guidance for governing bodies*.
- 4.2 Schools have been offered training linked to our regional school improvement service, Partneriaeth, on costing the school day. Things schools are asked to consider include:
 - The cost of school trips, particularly those abroad
 - The cost of non-uniform days and dressing up days (and how this can affect attendance for children living in poverty)
 - Charges for after-school clubs
 - Charges for fruit, cooking etc.
 - Asking for contributions for school fetes, discos etc.
 - Access to technology for homework
 - Pressure to keep up with styles and trends when certain items are allowed in schools

5. School uniform

- 5.1 The Welsh Government's *School uniform and appearance: policy guidance for governing bodies* includes the following statements regarding how a school uniform should be set by a governing body:
- Basic items and colours that can be bought from multiple retail suppliers at reasonable prices
 - Avoid high-cost items such as blazers and caps
 - Avoid variation in colours and style for different year groups as this is expensive for parents and limits the scope for second-hand sale or handing on to siblings
 - Have easily washable items: dry clean only items should be avoided
 - Limit the frequency of uniform changes
 - Consider the cost and availability of non-standard sizes
 - Transitional period for any change
 - If considering different uniforms for summer and winter consider whether it is proportionate and justifiable to do so
 - Secondary schools are encouraged to consider the feasibility of aligning their school uniform policy with those of their feeder primary schools to enable any core uniform items to continue to be used
- 5.2 School uniform grant (now called School Essentials Grant) from the Welsh Government is available to children and young people who are:
- eligible for free school meals (eFSM)
 - Looked After Children (LAC)
 - classed as No Resource to Public Funds (NRPF)
 - in year groups Reception to Year 11 (as of September 2024)
- 5.3 Funding available is £125 for each eligible learner with the exception of those in Year 7, who will be entitled to £200.
- 5.4 The grant can be spent on:
- School uniform including coats and shoes;
 - School sports kit including footwear;
 - IT equipment: laptop and tablets ONLY (School Essentials should only be used in limited situations where a school is unable to loan equipment to the family);
 - Uniform for enrichment activities, including but not limited to: scouts; guides; cadets; martial arts; sports; performing arts, or dance;
 - Equipment - for example, school bags and stationery;
 - Specialist equipment where new curriculum activities begin such as design and technology;
 - Equipment for out-of-school hours trips such as outdoor learning - for example, waterproofs.

- 5.5 Swansea Council uses an online system for parents/carers to apply for the grant. Payments are made directly into bank accounts a few days after applications are submitted. Should a parent be unable to use this system they can work through their school, where purchases will be made on their behalf.
- 5.6 It should be noted that pupils receiving the universal free school meal are not eligible for the uniform grant unless they meet the eligibility income criteria for free school meals. Also some older children who do receive a free meal do so because of the Welsh Government's 'transitional protection'. This means that a child may have been entitled to a free school meal because of income levels, and even though the income level has increased the free school meal has been protected. This causes a lot of confusion for parents and carers who do not understand why they are not eligible for the uniform grant when their child is in receipt of free school meals.
- 5.7 Most schools in Swansea offer a recycling service to enable uniform to be reused. Swansea Council also supports GROW, a charity that launders and recycles school uniform, usually for £1 an item [Projects – GROW Cymru: A Women's Help enterprise in Swansea](#)

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 There are no legal implications.

7. Finance Implications

- 7.1 There are no finance implications.

8. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 8.1 The report is for information and not for decision.

Background papers:

Corporate Plan [Corporate plan 2023 / 2028 - Swansea](#)

Welsh Government School Uniform Policy [School uniform and appearance: policy guidance for governing bodies | GOV.WALES](#)

Appendices:

Appendix A – Flowchart on Use of PDG

Flowchart on Use of PDG

