

A photograph of a school hallway. The floor is a checkered pattern of blue and light-colored tiles. On the right side, there are rows of blue lockers. In the background, several people, likely students and staff, are walking or standing. The lighting is bright, coming from overhead fixtures.

NARROWING THE GAP IN SCHOOLS



A report of the Ambitious Plymouth Cooperative Review scrutiny group following a review of Narrowing the Gap in Schools.

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I. SUMMARY

The Ambitious Plymouth Scrutiny Panel agreed to hold a scrutiny review into Narrowing the Gap in Schools, which was endorsed by Cooperative Scrutiny Board on 7 August 2013.

The review identified that there is a national focus on reducing the gap between the attainment of pupils on free school meals (FSM) and their non-free school meals peers. The government's intention is to ensure that those children who began life with some social disadvantage are not disadvantaged further through under-performance in educational terms. The review expanded on this to also focus on the attainment and take up of FSM from Looked After Children (LAC) and children from service families. Additionally the review addressed the concerns of the welfare reforms and its impacts on the eligibility of FSM and free school transport. Furthermore, the review also considered the financial burden placed on parents of school aged children from non-school uniform days and Proms.

The panel, in developing their knowledge of FSM, the impacts of welfare reforms and financial issues that are affecting parents were robustly informed about, amongst other issues, attainment results, national and local legislation, pupil premium provision and FSM eligibility. To aid the panel's discussions a number of witnesses were interviewed and site visits were held to undertake lunchtime observations.

The panel in analysing all the information agreed to make a number of recommendations, which will be submitted to Cabinet, via the Cooperative Scrutiny Board and are presented in section II of the report.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 This report gives the findings from the Ambitious Plymouth Scrutiny Panel's Cooperative Review on the topic of Narrowing the Gap in Schools.

2.2 The Cooperative Review took place on four separate dates throughout September, October, November and December 2013.

2.3 Members appointed to the Cooperative Review were as follows:

- Councillor Sally Bowie (Chair of the group)
- Councillor Paul Jarvis (Vice-Chair of the group)
- Councillor Glenn Jordan
- Councillor John Smith

2.4 Officers supporting the Cooperative Review were as follows:

- Jayne Gorton, Senior Education Officer (Lead Officer)
- Ross Johnston, Democratic Support Officer

2.5 This report summarises the findings of the Cooperative Review and makes recommendations for improvements.

3. BACKGROUND – FREE SCHOOL MEALS (FSM) AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC)

3.1 FSM Eligibility

Free school meals are granted to students of statutory school age, and also to Post 16 students studying at school (but not at an FE college). Nursery age children qualify for assistance if they are in a Local Authority funded place and attend both a morning and afternoon session.

- Families qualify for free school meals if they are in receipt of one of the following benefits:
- Income Support
- Income based Job Seekers Allowance
- Child Tax Credit only (with no Working Tax Credit **and** an annual income not exceeding £16,190)
- Guarantee element of pension credit
- Income Related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act
- Pupils who receive income support in their own right are also entitled to receive free school meals.

3.2 FSM Application Process

The application for free school meals is made through the school where the parent is asked to complete an application form.

The school then provide the local authority with the information required to complete an online check with the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP). This is the National Insurance Number, parent's date of birth and their last name.

The information is uploaded to the DWP and the local authority receive a return to say whether or not the claimant has been found on the database. If the claimant is found, the local authority notifies the school within 24 hours that the pupil is eligible. Should the claimant be 'not found' on the DWP system the parent is asked to provide paper based proof of entitlement of benefit to support their claim. School administrators can authorise a claim for free meals when they have verified the evidence, so the child can receive a free meal on that day.

The application form is also available on the PCC website.

Renewals are undertaken on an annual basis using the parent's details that are held on the PCC database. A parent will only be asked to submit further paper evidence if they are shown as 'not found' on the DWP system.

3.3 FSM Publicity

The Education Catering Service produce menus twice yearly and these have information on the back informing parents how to apply for free school meals. Information is also available on the PCC website:

<http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/homepage/education/schools/schoolmeals/freemeals.htm>

3.4 FSM Entitlement (Plymouth)

As of 5 September 2013 there were 6,313 children eligible for free school meals attending Plymouth Schools (This number excludes pupils attending Plymstock School, Coombe Dean School and Oreston Primary School, who have purchased the checking service through a different authority).

3.5 Attainment - FSM

Table 1: Plymouth's attainment performance at Key Stage 2:

Level 4+ English		GAP	Level 4+ Maths		GAP	Level 4+ English and Maths		GAP
FSM	Non FSM		FSM	Non FSM		FSM	Non FSM	
72%	87%	15%	75%	87%	12%	65%	82%	17%

Table 2: Plymouth's attainment performance at Key Stage 4:

5 A* - C (inc English and Maths)		GAP	5 A* - C		GAP
FSM	Non FSM		FSM	Non FSM	
34.1%	61.3%	27.2%	73.9%	86.5%	12.6%

A full list of attainment performance figures with comparisons against statistical and regional neighbours are provided in Appendix A.

Plymouth LA compared to statistical neighbours

In reaching national expectations (level 4) at KS 2, the gaps in attainment for pupils entitled to free school meals show that Plymouth has the smallest gap in all areas where there is data available. This is the most significant analysis in that the other authorities face similar challenges in terms of social and economic deprivation. At KS4 the gap in FSM attainment for the percentage of pupils who achieve five good GCSE passes is also the smallest. When English and maths are added Plymouth's gap is the third smallest. Interestingly 34.1% of pupils entitled to FSM achieved this national expectation which is the second highest percentage amongst our statistical neighbours and the two LAs with smaller gaps had lower attainment levels.

Plymouth compared to regional neighbours

Comparisons with LAs across the region are a little more mixed as the characteristics of these areas vary considerably. However Plymouth's gaps still compare very favourably. The percentage of FSM pupils who meet the national expectation of achieving a Level 4 in

both English and maths is still the smallest. In English the gap is the joint 3rd smallest and in maths it is the second smallest. At KS4 Plymouth's gap remains the smallest in comparison with SW LAs for the percentage of pupils getting five good GCSE passes. When English and maths are included Plymouth's gap is the 5th smallest out of 15 LAs.

Conclusion

It appears that on 2012 statistics pupils entitled to FSM achieve better results in Plymouth than they might in just about any other Local Authority in the South West and better than any of the city's statistical neighbours.

3.6 Exclusions

Figures for exclusions in Plymouth in 2012/2013 Academic year in relation to pupils eligible for FSM were outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: FSM exclusion data 2012/2013

	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	Special Schools	Academy Schools
Total Fixed Term Exclusions	106	680	81	110
Total Fixed Term Exclusions form pupils eligible for FSM	68	290	64	62
Percentage of Total Fixed Term exclusions from pupils eligible for FSM	64.02%	42.64%	79.01%	56.36%

3.7 Attainment - LAC

Providing details on attainment results of children in looked after care was reported to be more difficult than for FSM, although the panel were advised that the data obtained showed that in 2012 outcomes at KS2 were below comparable averages whilst those at KS4 were in-line or above comparable averages.

Table 4: Plymouth's attainment performance at KS2:

KS2	Cohort size	% English Level 4+	% Maths Level 4 +	% English and Maths Level 4 +
England	2020	60	56	50
South West	140	60	56	51
Portsmouth	10	67	50	50
Plymouth	19	53	47	42

Table 5: Plymouth's attainment performance at KS4:

KS4	Cohort size	% 5 A* - C	% 5 A* - C (Inc English and Maths)
England	4850	36.8	14.6
South West	450	29.8	12.1
Portsmouth	20	31.8	X
Plymouth	28	39.3	14.3

4. BACKGROUND – PUPIL PREMIUM FUND

4.1 Origins of Pupil Premium

The Pupil Premium fund was introduced in April 2011 to provide additional support for Looked after Children and those from low income families. The funding provided from Pupil Premium is made available to schools to help them narrow the attainment gap that still exists between disadvantaged pupils and pupils from more affluent backgrounds.

A disadvantaged pupil is anyone who has been registered for FSM at any point in the last six years (known as 'Ever 6 FSM').

4.2 Pupil Premium Grant 2013 / 2014 in Plymouth

In addition to Looked after Children and Pupil Premium Grants schools also receive funding for children from service personnel.

In Plymouth the grants available for 2013/2014 are outlined in Table 6.

Table 6: Pupil Premium in Plymouth per pupil 2013 / 2014

Type of Pupil	Pupil Premium per pupil	Plymouth allocation in £m
Pupils recorded as Ever 6 FSM	£900	£8.479m
Looked after Children	£900	£0.732m
Service Children	£300	£0.212m
Total		£9.423m

4.3 Terms on which Pupil Premium Grant is allocated to schools

The pupil premium grant may be spent by maintained schools for the purposes of the school; that is to say for the educational benefit of pupils registered at that school, or for the benefit of pupils registered at other maintained schools; and on community facilities, for example services whose provision furthers any charitable purpose for the benefit of pupils at the school or their families, or people who live or work in the locality in which the school is situated.

The grant does not have to be completely spent by schools in the financial year beginning 1 April 2013; some or all of it may be carried forward to future financial years.

4.4 Accountability

The government believes that head teachers and school leaders should decide how to use the pupil premium. They are held accountable for the decisions they make through:

- the performance tables which show the performance of disadvantaged pupils compared with their peers;
- the Ofsted inspection framework, under which inspectors focus on the attainment of pupil groups, and in particular those who attract the pupil premium;
- the reports for parents that schools have to publish online;

How schools present the information in their online statement is a matter for each school. There is certain information that must be in the report: the school's pupil premium allocation in respect of the current academic year; details of how it is intended that the allocation will be spent; details of how the previous academic year's allocation was spent, and the impact of this expenditure on the educational attainment of those pupils at the school, in respect of whom grant funding was allocated.

Local authorities are required to certify that they have passed on the correct amount of funding to maintained schools or, where funding has been spent centrally, that it has been spent in line with the conditions of grant. Academies receive the pupil premium grant direct from the Education Funding Agency (EFA).

4.5 Spending Statistics

Schools are not required to separately report expenditure against the pupil premium grant within the statutory accounts. Capturing information on spending statistics is therefore difficult. Ofsted conducted a survey in September 2012 to identify how schools were using this money to raise achievement and improve outcomes for these pupils.

4.6 Key Findings of the Ofsted survey

In 2012–13 schools were allocated a total of £1.25 billion funding for children from low-income families who were eligible for free school meals, looked after children and those from families with parents in the Armed Forces. The aim of this survey was to identify how schools were using this money to raise achievement and improve outcomes for these pupils. The survey is based on the views of 262 school leaders gathered through inspections and telephone interview questionnaires conducted by Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Key findings

- Only one in 10 school leaders said that the Pupil Premium had significantly changed the way that they supported pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- School leaders commonly said that they were using the funding to maintain or enhance existing provision rather than to put in place new initiatives.
- Schools did not routinely disaggregate the Pupil Premium funding from their main budget, especially when receiving smaller amounts.

- Over two fifths of the schools had used the Pupil Premium at least in part to fund new or existing teaching assistants and over one quarter to fund new or existing teachers. To a lesser degree, schools had used the funding to pay for new or existing parent support workers, behaviour support workers or counsellors.
- Around a third of school leaders said that they had used the funding for additional curriculum opportunities for pupils both within and outside of normal school hours. A third of all schools said that they had used the funding to subsidise or pay for educational trips or residential visits. Around one in six said that they had used the funding to subsidise or pay for uniform and equipment.
- In some schools it was clear to inspectors that the spending was not all focused on the needs of the specific groups for whom it was intended.
- The survey revealed a lack of transparency in the way that some special schools and pupil referral units received their allocation of Pupil Premium money from their local authority.
- Inspectors saw little evidence of a strong focus on the Pupil Premium by governors or managing committees.
- Just over two fifths of the mainstream secondary school leaders who responded to the telephone survey said that they were involved in the Pupil Premium summer school programme. Very few mainstream primary schools said that they were involved in the Pupil Premium summer school programme.
- Very few schools said the Pupil Premium was having any impact on their approach to admissions or exclusions.

5. COOPERATIVE REVIEW PROCESS

The Cooperative Scrutiny Board approved a request for a Cooperative Review form on 7 August 2013 for the establishment of a Cooperative Review on 'Narrowing the Gap in Schools' with membership drawn from the Ambitious Plymouth Scrutiny Panel.

5.1 Cooperative Review Objectives

The main objectives for the Cooperative Review were to:

1. to ensure that the attainment results of pupils who take up FSM, pupils who are classed as Looked After Children and pupils from service families are not negatively affected – this will be reviewed and measured using school attainment results data and recommendations considered to seek to improve this situation if any negative analysis is found;
2. To understand the impacts of Welfare Reforms on FSM eligibility and school transport provision and seek to ensure relevant advice and information is provided to parents who will be negatively affected;
3. To ensure schools are aware of the financial pressures being placed on parents from extra activities including non-school uniform days, school days out and school proms and establish whether any alternatives can be provided to ease the financial burden on parents.

5.2 Cooperative Review Methodology

The Cooperative Review convened over four days on the following dates:

- 17 September 2013

- 22 October 2013
- 5 November 2013
- 3 December 2013

At each meeting the group met to consider evidence, review background information and hear from witnesses.

The witnesses who presented evidence to the panel were:

- Rona Smith, Co-Director Excellence Cluster
- Lisa Hartley, Co-Director Excellence Cluster
- Heather Ogburn, Senior Leadership Advisor
- John Searson, Principal Leadership Advisor
- Councillor Nicky Williams, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
- Judith Harwood, Assistant Director for Education, Learning & Families
- Brad Pearce, Education Catering Manager
- Julie Roantree, Transport and Allowance Officer
- Councillor Chris Penberthy, Cabinet Member for Cooperatives and Communities
- Chris Angle, Finance and Social Inclusion Officer
- Sarah McNeice, Citizens Advice Bureau
- Dave Maddison, Head Teacher at Morice Town Primary School
- Carol Hannaford, Principal Stoke Damerel Community College

5.3 Contextual Overview

In order to aid members of the Cooperative Review Jayne Gorton, Senior Education Officer (Lead Officer) presented a number of reports which provided members with the required background knowledge to aid their questioning of witnesses. All background information was included as agenda items and published accordingly with the agenda and can be viewed by following the link below:

<http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/modgov?modgovlink=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.plymouth.gov.uk%2FmgInternet%2FieListDocuments.aspx%3FCId%3D1070%26amp%3BMid%3D5651%26amp%3BVer%3D4>

6. PROCEEDINGS FROM THE COOPERATIVE REVIEW

6.1 Meeting one

The panel met on 17 September 2013 where they received an introduction from Jayne Gorton highlighting the remit of the Cooperative Review and an explanation of the background reports submitted.

Brad Pearce, Education Catering Manager and Julie Roantree, Transport and Allowance Officer were in attendance to explain and discuss the reports submitted on Free School Meals. Members were informed that –

(a)	the schools catering service nutritionally analysed all school meals, employed over 250 staff and provided school meals to 62 primary schools, five special schools, two primary academies and two secondary academies;
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(b)	the service was now also providing a community meals service, which maximised labour and reduced costs, and had plans to provide a meal service to Mount Gould Hospital;
(c)	the school transport and allowance team dealt with school transport and FSM applications and administration.

In response to members' questions it was reported that –

(d)	over the past three years there had been a gradual increase in FSM applications, with approximately , 6,300 children provided with a FSM compared with approximately 5,000 in 2009/10;
(e)	the stigma of FSM was reducing and would be further reduced with the introduction of cash-less lunch payment systems, currently there was a trial operating in 10 schools in the city on a web-based cash-less payment system;
(f)	the school meal system was sustainable, although take-up was only 38 per cent; if take-up increased to 60 per cent then approximately £600k would be generated as surplus monies for reinvestment. Schools should be encouraged to promote school meals as the benefits will be to the child, education and financial reinvestment;
(g)	the city had a high number of children requiring transport for medical needs due to improvements in medical technologies and Plymouth had maintained seven special schools;
(h)	of all pupils eligible for FSM in the January 2013 Schools Census only 71 per cent of them took up the FSM in July 2013;
(i)	the school catering service offered a choice of four meals on a daily basis, a hot main meal, a hot vegetarian meal, a jacket potato and filling and a cold meal option (a sandwich or baguette); some schools insisted that the cold meal option was not available during the colder Winter months;
(j)	some schools still separate children with packed lunches from children eating school dinners, this can deter some children from wanting a school meal and encourages a form of segregation; the reasons are usually due to accommodation difficulties
(k)	lunchtime periods had over recent years been reduced; this has had negative impacts on social interaction, pupils communication and children wanting to eat a school meal, if the service was to reach its aspiration of 60 per cent children eating a school meal then the lunchtime period would need to be extended to accommodate these extra meal requests.

The panel received evidence from a number of witnesses as follows:

Rona Smith and Lisa Hartley, Excellence Cluster

Members were informed that –

(a)	the Excellence Cluster was set up in 2004 as a government initiative to improve support for schools; currently the service provided support to 93 per cent of the city’s primary schools;
(b)	the service predominantly supported children with social and emotional needs, with many of the young people supported being eligible for FSM;
(c)	the service was a multi-agency service and was now funded from schools buying-in the services, which included therapists, councillors, family support workers, social workers and education psychologists;
(d)	the service provided a very quick turnaround from request to service, with practitioners responding to all service requests and meeting with the child within one week.

In response to members’ questions it was reported that –

(e)	Pupil Premium funding was one financial mechanism that allowed schools the opportunity to buy-in the services offered from the Excellence Cluster;
(f)	the service was seeing a year-on-year increase in service requests, with over 1000 cases being active on any one-day;
(g)	the service has become far more integrated over recent years, working collaboratively with other services including the psychology service; this has both improved service co-ordination and the support offered from the Excellence Cluster to primary children all across the city;
(h)	the service operates an ‘audit of need’ which enables the practitioners to effectively monitor progress with young people and identify additional services that may benefit the young person;
(g)	the service employs 86 staff which demonstrated how much the service had grown since it started in 2004 when there was only 8 staff employed;
(i)	the Excellence Cluster hoped to expand the service to work with secondary schools pupils; this was currently being explored with Stoke Damerel Community College;
(j)	the service was not promoted as a service that could increase attainment in young people; however, following a review two years’ ago it was established that children far exceeded levels of grades and attainment after service buy-in;

Heather Ogburn and John Searson, Plymouth City Council

Members were informed that –

(a)	the main remit of the services that they were responsible for included:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• to advise, guide and support schools to improve education standards and ensure good levels of pupil attainment;
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• to monitor and review the allocation and spending of the Pupil Premium;
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• to review the attainment and performance of pupils across a number areas including Looked After Children (LAC), FSM and service children;
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• working on the aspiration and ensuring best practice is developed for the national issue of ‘narrowing the gap’.

In response to members’ questions it was reported that –

(b)	approximately 6.5 per cent of the children in Plymouth came from a service background;
(c)	the service worked closely with the Naval Personal and Family Service (NPFS) and other third sector organisations to deliver an improved cooperative network offering support to families and children from a service background;
(d)	children from service families were entitled to the Service Child Pupil Premium and not the Deprivation Pupil Premium associated with FSM;
(e)	the service was concerned that the impacts of welfare reforms on parents could have a negative effect on the attendance of children at school, particularly in children aged 15 – 16;
(f)	in an attempt to combat these concerns the service had organised training sessions with parent support workers on the potential impacts from welfare reforms and had been working with social inclusion unit and schools to monitor attendance.

Councillor Nicky Williams, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Members were informed that –

(a)	a FSM focus only approach would not adequately tell the story of ‘narrowing the gap’ and it was equally as important to focus on working parents, not eligible for their children to be entitled to FSM, who were struggling financially;
(b)	being able to remove barriers and stigma was key to developing a positive learning environment that narrows the gap effectively and provides an equal opportunity for all to achieve; there was some excellent work going across the city where this was happening, for example, at Morice Town Primary School;
(c)	focusing on schools like Morice Town Primary School and the innovative

	approaches they have taken in removing barriers would enable the panel to get a better understanding as to why children of all backgrounds were able to achieve attainment at the same levels.
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In response to members' questions it was reported that –

(d)	under-employment and unfair pay schemes were major reasons for there being an issue with the working poor and the council and its partners were working closely to address these issues;
(e)	breakfast clubs and after-school clubs were a vital resource for parents who were struggling to work whilst their children were in school;
(f)	in 2009 the City Council rejected a motion to provide a FSM to all pupils in primary schools across the city, this was mainly due to the requirement for the Council to provide £3m in match-funding; however, if this motion had been approved then arguably the 'narrowing the gap' issue would have been reduced over that period with recent studies on the pilot projects providing a FSM to every school pupil found that attainment results had been increased by 2 months.

In addition the issue of school proms was discussed with the following points were raised for consideration at Meeting 3.

(g)	the panel should establish a good evidence base on the effects of school proms before making recommendations to schools, however, if there was evidence suggesting that school proms were detrimental to parents/families financial affairs or children's attainment results then it would be in the school's interest to take note of the recommendations and consider alternative options;
(h)	pupils should be encouraged to organise and prepare their own school proms, in a similar fashion to the way school proms are organised in the U.S.A, as this would provide relevant life skills and open up the prom to all pupils rather than only to those children whose families could afford the tickets for proms;
(i)	the prom was supposed to be a celebration of achievement and navigation through school and this element should be the focus of the school in organising the prom. Key questions for schools should be 'what are the values of the prom', 'is your prom inclusive, can all pupils access the prom easily', 'does the prom and its organisation help the school in 'narrowing the gap'.

Judith Harwood, Plymouth City Council

Members were informed that –

(a)	this review was very appropriate as 11,500 of the city's children were in financial poverty, and a targeted approach should be encouraged to improve the opportunities for these young people;
(b)	the attainment area of the 'narrowing the gap' agenda appears to be widening as there were over 40 per cent of young people not achieving 5 GCSE's or more but

	there was less than 40 per cent living in poverty;
(c)	there appeared to be a clash between schools aspirations and focus on attainment and pupil progress and young people's aspirations for employability and training; this is a concern for employers as there is strong feelings that young people are not ready for work;

In response to members' questions it was reported that –

(d)	there is evidence that suggests most young people go on to do A – Levels, particularly in Plymouth where there is a sixth form facility offered at every secondary school within the city, however, for those seeking apprenticeships the evidence suggests children from working families are more likely to be successful in receiving an apprenticeship opportunity;
(e)	teachers should be trained more comprehensively about recognising the signs of deprivation and the impact that this has on young people;
(f)	there was a lack of confidence and credibility in the education system and young people should be encouraged to learn and develop basic employability skills;
(g)	many schools nationally have shortened the lunch break periods, this is having an extremely detrimental effect on the social skills of young people; a lunch-time period is a vital resource available for young people to develop communication skills.

In addition the issue of school proms was discussed with the following point raised for consideration at Meeting 3:

School proms were concerning, particularly with its lack of focus on inclusivity and these raised issues for the 'narrowing the gap' agenda.

6.2 Meeting two

The panel met on 22 October 2013 where they received an overview of 'to-follow' reports from Jayne Gorton, reviewed the findings from meeting one and heard from witnesses as follows:

Councillor Chris Penberthy, Cabinet Member for Cooperatives and Communities

Members were informed that –

(a)	over the past three years benefits had been reduced or removed which had caused an increase in low income families, with this situation being exacerbated by rising costs. A major concern were benefit dependent people but equally or even more of a concern were families who were just above the level to receive benefits and were struggling on very low incomes; this had been termed the grey zone;
(b)	as the gap between wages and cost of living continues to increase there is a fear

	that the number of families and children living in the 'grey zone' will also increase;
(c)	one of the biggest issues were families not knowing or being able to claim benefits that they were entitled to; this situation puts a huge pressure on families to manage their finances often leading them to make choices such as to eat or heat, this can have a significant impact on children's welfare and educational abilities – how far can a child concentrate at school if they are cold or hungry;
(d)	Plymouth Community Homes housing stock had been through a major upgrade over the past few years and this had resulted in many homes having improved boilers fitted leading to a significant improvement in children's health through the reduction in mould related asthma; however, the city's private housing did not have the same basic standards and was a serious issue for children and families;
(e)	raising children's aspirations should be a major function of the council as high levels of child poverty, benefit dependency and youth unemployment have significant impacts on children's aspirations.

In response to members' questions it was reported that –

(f)	the Police and other organisations are concerned as to the patterns of crime, ASB and public order offences as they show links to the impacts of welfare reductions;
(g)	despite the summer and autumn in 2013 being mild and warm, the food bank has had to work harder this year than ever before and there have also been increases in financial requests from Church Ministers; both are situations that anecdotally suggest that the impacts from welfare reforms are getting worse;
(h)	Plymouth City Council had been working hard on mitigating the impacts of welfare reforms, particularly through targeting issues of alcoholism and domestic abuse; further work on these issues is expected to be undertaken by the Community Safety Partnership.

In response to the panel's question 'is there anything that you would like the review panel to consider when making its recommendations?' the following suggestions were provided:

1.	many children attend school without having had breakfast, which was a real issue and the use of the FSM allowance to incorporate a breakfast could make a significant difference to the ability of children to learn and their overall attainment;
2.	The use of schools could be improved to become an institution that can be key to the on-going education of all Plymouth's citizens and not just children, for example, a school can be a really important community hub, a facility that could be used as a library to provide access to the internet and computers to all of the local community.

Chris Angle, Finance and Social Inclusion Officer

Members were informed that –

(a)	The implementation of the welfare reforms has been vast and happened very quickly, which has meant that many departments have had to change a number of their processes and procedures and reorganise the services they provide in a very frantic environment.
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In response to members' questions it was reported that –

(b)	the spare room subsidy had affected many citizens in Plymouth and those residents who have applied to downsize have been allocated a Band B rating in the housing allocation scheme. The problem for downsizing residents is that the city has a low level of one bedroom properties meaning downsizing is becoming very difficult and meaning that many residents receive a penalty by way of a cut in their housing benefit;
(c)	FSM promotion and advertising could be extended to distribution through housing benefit and council tax benefit communications; this would raise awareness of FSM and would be likely to increase the numbers of children registered which in turn would increase the level of pupil premium funding available for Plymouth schools;
(d)	many of the working-poor, those people who were classed as in the 'grey' zone, could be eligible for FSM and improved promotion could encourage these families to apply;
(e)	many of Plymouth's families were struggling to manage their finances and there was a lack of training opportunities to teach people to manage their budgets;
(f)	the impacts of the upcoming Universal Credits could be vast for Plymouth and have significant consequences for school transport provision and FSM eligibility.

In response to the panel's question 'is there anything that you would like the review panel to consider when making its recommendations?' the following suggestions were provided:

1.	that FSM promotional aids are included as part of the Council's correspondence to residents about Housing Benefit and Council Tax;
2.	that applying for FSM should be made easier for residents and consideration given to using a register by text service, a service similar to the text service used for the electoral register;
3.	increased partnership working between the Council and partnership agencies to provide budgeting skills training courses to encourage healthy eating and managing finances.

Sarah McNeice, Citizens Advice Bureau

Members were informed that –

(a)	the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) had been working with other agencies including Plymouth City Council to offer training on benefits and welfare reforms, which incorporated an element of managing a budget;
(b)	a recommendation had been sent to Government by the national CAB body to encourage the Universal Credit system to have a positive impact on FSM by enabling all families in receipt of Universal Credits to be eligible for FSM;
(c)	the CAB had seen an increase in cases of debts and many of these appear to be about budgeting issues, with many families struggling with paying for food and bills and increases in fuel poverty and water company debts;
(d)	Universal credits, which propose to pay one monthly payment for all benefits, will have significant impacts on families abilities to budget and is a genuine concern for many families.

In response to members' questions it was reported that –

(d)	in recent times there had been a greater demand placed on the services offered by CAB and the complexity of cases had increased. A major concern for CAB was the increase in numbers of single males under 25 who were now using the service, a group that CAB had historically not had many dealings with;
(e)	The budgeting sessions offered encouraged people to identify where their money is being spent and reviews energy tariffs, shopping habits, travel requirements and communication needs, to establish if better options were available;
(f)	Universal Credits will be provided to only one member of the household which is a concern for many particularly if the member who receives the money has a dependency addiction as this means the money may not be spent where it should be and put extreme pressures on families already under stress.

Dave Maddison, Head Teacher at Morice Town Primary School

Members were informed that –

(a)	Morice Town Primary School operated in the context of a local community with many variations of social demographics, with 46 per cent of pupils eligible for FSM and over 50 per cent of pupil's available for pupil premium funding; the school sat around third or fourth in terms of deprivation in the city;
(b)	the school has a nursery and Surestart Centre attached to its facility and was now registering two year olds at its nursery following the local authority offering free places for 15 hours a week to two year olds in this area;
(c)	over the past three or four years the school had consistently achieved good SAT's results at levels four and five, achieving 100 per cent attainment at the national

	level in the past two years at Key Stage 2 SATs;
(d)	Morice Town Primary School's improvement and consistency was down to a number of factors including:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ looking at all the elements of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and removing all potential barriers that may affect the individual learning needs of all pupils; ■ ensuring all children are well nourished by providing a breakfast club, offering a service for 15p; ■ developing a child's resilience and teaching them how to manage their feelings; ■ joining up with other schools to be part of a cooperative trust, to make best use of knowledge, best practice and service sharing; ■ buying in services from the Excellence Cluster and being part of the Plymouth Teaching School Alliance (PTSA); ■ undertaking a six weekly review of all our pupils to understand their needs and their barriers to learning and to provide support and resources to meet the pupil's needs;
(e)	one of the concerns for the school has been that FSM pupils were out-performing non FSM pupils.

In response to members' questions it was reported that –

(f)	the working poor families in the area were more likely to use breakfast clubs and after school clubs which could be a reason attributed to the attainment results of non FSM pupils;
(g)	the breakfast club option was currently unsustainable and the school had been working on delivering a more sustainable option offering a breakfast of cereal, toast, milk and a hot drink for one pound;
(h)	the school's lunch time period operated a family system, where children are grouped into a family of eight and the oldest child needs to look after the family and ensure that they all get their lunch at their appointment time; this promotes a safer and calmer lunch period where conversation is encouraged;
(i)	the school held the lunch period over one hour and encouraged children with packed lunches and hot meals to eat together in their families;
(j)	the school offers free fruit to all pupils in KS1 and children in KS2 could purchase fruit from the canteen, for example an apple at a cost of 15p;
(k)	the school was part of 'let's get cooking' campaign and offered clubs during and after school that encouraged parents to learn about food and cook with their children, additionally the school's gardening club grow ingredients which were used

	in the 'let's get cooking' clubs;
(l)	the school has very high expectations now of its pupils, teachers and parents and include expectations for attainment, effort and behaviour as well as a expectations for teacher and pupil relations with the promotion of care, respect and tolerance.

In response to the panel's question about 'is there anything that you would like the review panel to consider when making its recommendations?' the following suggestion was provided:

The school is unable to host a school residential, which is a fantastic resource for cementing a child's learning that many of the pupil's in Keyham and Devonport were missing out on and to rectify this situation and 'narrow the gap' a universal city-wide residential opportunity would assist pupils from these communities in developing their learning.

6.3 Meeting three

The panel met on 5 November 2013 where they received the results of the questionnaire about school proms distributed to all secondary schools in preparation for this meeting from Jayne Gorton. The information provided and discussed is as follows:

The questionnaire was distributed to all 16 secondary schools across the city.

Seven responses received, 2 schools indicated that they did not hold a prom and the responses from the remaining five are collated in Table 7 below:

Table 7: Findings of the School Prom questionnaire

Question	Response
How many pupils were in last year's Year 11?	Cohorts ranged from 134 to 220 depending on the size of the school
How many from the Year 11 cohort attended the Prom?	Ranged from 69% to 90%
Where did you hold last years Prom?	All held in Hotel/Country Club's around the city
How much were the tickets?	Average cost £25
Who makes the choice of where the Prom will be held?	Students usually set up a Prom Committee with staff to plan the occasion
Have you considered holding your Prom at school?	Yes but students generally what it to be special and away from the school
Are all Year 11's invited to attend?	Yes – all initially invited (in some cases the conduct of the students may preclude them from attending)

Do you offer any financial assistance for the Prom?	Yes - reward systems in place to support costs for students
Do you offer any other assistance? e.g. Second hand dresses/suits / transport etc.	Mini bus for transport Second hand dresses/suits, and in some cases other discretionary support.

Members reviewed the findings from meeting two and heard from witnesses as follows:

Brad Pearce, Education Catering Manager

Members were informed that –

(a)	the government announced that it would be providing £600m worth of funding to provide a FSM for all Key Stage 1 pupils from September 2014;
(b)	the cost of the FSM for Key Stage 1 pupils was based on an average school meal cost of £2.30 with local authorities receiving different amounts of funding per FSM depending on their geographic location;
(c)	if the school catering service increased its supply of school meals to 60 per cent then the actual cost of providing a school meal would be closer to 90p than the current cost of £2.37;
(d)	the cost of meeting the FSM for Key Stage 1 pupils would not affect the pupil premium fund and the registration process for FSM would continue to ensure that pupils eligible for a FSM under the current criteria still registered to ensure that the school received its allocated pupil premium funding;
(e)	the additional pupils now eligible for a FSM will put pressure on some schools on how they will manage and accommodate the extra pupils eating a hot school meal;
(f)	to assist schools in amending their lunch-time infrastructure and staffing costs a government grant or interest free loan is available for schools to apply for to help them meet the additional costs.

In response to members' questions it was reported that –

(f)	the FSM allowance was available for lunch only and should not be used for breakfast, however, the pupil premium fund for schools could be used to provide a breakfast facility;
(g)	the school catering service's kitchens could be made available for schools to use to run a breakfast club;
(h)	the school catering service had received gold standard and one aspect of receiving this accolade was that all schools used the correct crockery during lunch service and not plastic trays;
(i)	the universal FSM programme would be putting approximately £380 per year per child back into parents pockets for children in Key Stage 1.

Judith Harwood, Assistant Director for Education, Learning and Families

Members were informed that –

(a)	school proms could be operating in a fashion which goes against the values of inclusivity and fairness;
(b)	the way the school proms were promoted put a huge amount of pressure on parents to finance an outfit, accessories, transport and ticket cost.

In response to members' questions it was reported that –

(c)	although proms were an issue with inclusivity it was not the only or most significant issue for schools and the panel should address its concerns and thinking more towards the spending of the pupil premium which could be more effective;
(d)	knowing what works with education and how innovative and effective spending of the pupil premium fund is narrowing the gap in some areas should be the focus of the panel and concentrate its efforts on trying to promote the best practice and spread the knowledge of what works more widely;
(e)	the local authority could take a more regulatory role in understanding what schools were spending their pupil premium fund and how this was narrowing the gap.

Lisa Hartley, Excellence Cluster

Members were informed that –

(a)	the school prom was part of a wider area of concern in the sexualisation of young people; this issue had national focus and Alison Seabek MP was due to be championing this issue in early 2014;
(b)	the school prom was a very important event in a young persons' life and the schools and local authority needed to support such events whilst ensuring there was a balance between fairness, equality and protection of young people from the issues of sexualisation;
(c)	it was important for schools to try and engage as many young people in events such as the prom, to ensure that access was available for all young people to raise their aspirations and provide opportunities for them to attend events and occasions that they are passionate about; Stoke Damerel Community College is excellent at this kind of promotion for young people;

Carol Hannaford, Principal at Stoke Damerel Community College

Members were informed that –

(a)	not all pupils wish to attend the school prom and to provide an opportunity to
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	celebrate leaving school for all pupils Stoke Damerel Community College organises a school leavers assembly for pupils and parents to come in and review their child's school journey, which is always given a topical theme set by a group of pupils from that year group;
(b)	the school prom is an amazing experience for all the pupils who attend and the school tries to find out all of the pupils who are considering not going to the prom to understand their reasons why and to establish if they school can help in any way for that pupil to be able to attend, for example, we offer reductions on the prom ticket and provide a reward system where good behaviour and good work receives payment off of the cost of the prom ticket;
(c)	Stoke Damerel Community College receives a large amount of pupil premium funding and this enables the school to effectively offer opportunities that can make a difference to a child's life and promote inclusivity.

In response to members' questions it was reported that Stoke Damerel Community College recognise that a young person's health is important to their ability to learn and in recognising this important need the school opens up a fitness suite in the morning and any pupil that attends receives a free breakfast.

7. CONCLUSION

In reviewing all of the witness evidence and analysing all of the data provided the panel identified a number of points of concerns regarding the areas reviewed. These concerns are summarised in the sections below:

7.1 FSM and Pupil Premium Fund

- 7.1.1** School lunch time periods had been shortened in many schools, for a number of different reasons, which could have impacted on the numbers of pupils wishing to eat a hot school meal.
- 7.1.2** Many schools did not provide a facility for pupils eating a hot school meal and pupils eating a packed lunch to sit and eat lunch together, which did not promote social interaction, a key element of the school lunch time period, and could act as a deterrent to pupils wishing to eat a hot school meal.
- 7.1.3** The numbers of pupils eating a hot school meal was concerning and it was hoped that through increased advertising and promotion, longer lunch periods and more interaction between pupils eating a hot school meal and a packed lunch the numbers of pupils requesting hot school meals would increase, enabling the Schools Catering Service to expand and offer better value for money services.
- 7.1.4** Many pupils did not eat breakfast, which was a national concern, and the number of breakfast clubs available offering a breakfast to all pupils in Plymouth was inadequate. Increased breakfast club offers in the city could increase the number of young people eating breakfast and have a positive impact on education and narrowing the gap in schools.
- 7.1.5** Many schools were allocated large amounts of pupil premium funding and the panel were concerned that there was limited data within the local authority on how this was being

spent. It was acknowledged that Ofsted held schools to account on this spending, however, the panel felt it was important that the Council had a greater understanding on the impacts that this spend was having on improving education, opportunities and the impacts it was having on the 'narrowing the gap' agenda.

- 7.1.6** Although the Council's Catering Service had improved greatly and had been awarded the Gold Food for Life Quality Mark, it was concerning that some of the schools using the Council's Catering Service may not be completely adhering to the standards expected of the Gold Food for Life Quality Mark e.g. using the correct crockery and cutlery.

7.2 Welfare Reforms

- 7.2.1** The panel acknowledged that not all information was currently available on Universal Credits and its impacts on Free School Meals eligibility; however, there was a concern that the impacts of this new welfare system could have detrimental consequences on FSM eligibility.

Additionally, the panel were concerned that the new Universal Credit system could put a lot of families in financial difficulties due to the benefit having one main beneficiary, which could potentially be a substance dependent person, and also the fact that the benefit will be paid monthly which could mean that many families may struggle with a lack of budgeting skills.

- 7.2.2** The working poor were often overlooked and were as likely if not more likely to struggle financially than those who were eligible for benefits.
- 7.2.3** The Citizens Advice Bureau had been working in partnership with Plymouth City Council and other partners to deliver budget skills and training, which was acknowledged as being extremely important and very effective in giving people an understanding of budgeting, particularly with the impacts of the Universal Credit system following its implementation. However, the panel was concerned that not enough was being provided on budget skills and training and believe that increased resource and a more promoted service would benefit many of the city's citizens, particularly those from the working poor.
- 7.2.4** The panel heard that there had been an increase in children being presented to GP surgeries with symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), which could be an attempt from families to become eligible for additional benefits. This practice if it was a reality could be significantly damaging for the young people in their later lives and was a significant concern which required further evidence and scrutiny.

7.3 School Proms

- 7.3.1** The panel having analysed the limited evidence provided on school proms were satisfied that the current arrangements used by those schools in organising school proms were appropriate, inclusive and fair for all young people and as a result the panel decided against making any recommendations in relation to school proms.

7.4 Other

- 7.4.1** The panel heard how many local communities within the city lacked access to many facilities e.g. computers and library facilities, which was a concern particularly with the

increased importance associated with computer and internet needs to access and apply for many services.

7.4.2 Schools could offer a fantastic community hub facility to enable communities to be able to access facilities for adult and community learning and social and recreational uses; however, there was a concern that many schools facilities were inflexible due to time requirements and the availability of a caretaker meaning that access was difficult for individuals and many community groups and organisations.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The below recommendations, were agreed by the Cooperative Review to be submitted to the Corporate Scrutiny Board and have been split into three categories for ease of reference.

8.1 FSM, Pupil Premium Fund and Schools

(1)	The Director for People in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People should develop a plan to be distributed to all schools encouraging them to –
	(i) Ensure all school lunchtime periods are timetabled to be sufficiently long enough to allow a minimum amount of time to eat a hot meal, suggested lunch period of 1 hour;
	(ii) Provide a facility that enables pupils with packed lunches and pupils eating a school meal to be located in the same dining area to eat their lunches together;
	(iii) Promote the school meal facility to all parents and embrace and proactively promote the new universal FSM opportunities for Key Stage 1 pupils and promote school transport opportunities available to children and families;
	(iv) Ensure that the school’s catering service staffs are trained to promote communication during lunch-time periods and to be included in school staff team meetings.
(2)	The Director for People in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People be requested to write to all schools within the city to encourage them to offer a breakfast facility or work with a private organisation to run a breakfast club, and also liaise with the School Catering Manager to improve the food options and availability of Free School Meals (FSM) to incorporate a meal deal that would enable children eligible for FSM to be provided with both a breakfast and lunch option;
(3)	The Director for People in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Cooperatives and Communities and the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People communicate with all schools across the city to encourage and create a plan that would see more schools being used by local communities as a local resource or community hub, to promote opportunities for adult education and learning and social and recreational requirements;

(4)	The Director for Children and Young People in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People is requested to discuss with the Plymouth Teaching School Alliance further opportunities to share good practice regarding school to school support, strategies for narrowing the gap and pupil premium funding with a view to publishing the findings in a good practice guide.
(5)	The Director for Children and Young People in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People should as far as possible ensure that all schools who use the Plymouth City Council catering service are working towards the Gold Food for Life Catering Mark;
(6)	The Director for Children and Young People in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People should request all schools within Plymouth to provide data on how they have spent the pupil premium funding and a report on the impacts this spend has had on improving education and opportunities for its pupils. On receipt of this information a report should be submitted to a Ambitious Plymouth scrutiny panel for scrutiny in 2014.

8.2 Welfare Reforms

(7)	The Cooperative Scrutiny Board or relevant scrutiny panel when undertaking scrutiny of welfare reforms seek to address the requirement of ensuring an appropriate and inclusive 'budgeting advice and training service' is made available and offered to all families and customers who require improved budgeting skills;
(8)	Tracey Lee, Chief Executive of Plymouth City Council, Councillor Tudor Evans, Leader of Plymouth City Council and Ian Bowyer, Leader of the Opposition in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Cooperatives and Communities consider writing a letter to the Government highlighting Plymouth City Council's concerns for the Universal Credit system and indicating the review panel's opinion that anyone who is in receipt of Universal Credit should automatically be entitled to FSMs where appropriate;
(9)	The Director for Corporate Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People should promote and advertise the FSM service and school transport opportunities in all correspondence about Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit claims;

8.3 Other

(10)	The Ambitious Plymouth Scrutiny Panel should add to its work programme the following –
(i)	Review the opportunities available for food education for parents in the city and how schools can have a role in improving these opportunities. There should be a focus as to what is currently available, such as the 'let's get cooking' scheme, and consider the potential for a food education cooperative to be set up in the more deprived areas of the city to promote the importance and skills of cooking, shopping and eating healthy;

(ii)	Review the Healthy Child Quality Mark scheme, to make sure it is delivering on its aims and that schools are actively taking part;
(iii)	Review the future development of the Excellence Cluster to establish the potential of extending this service to be offered to secondary schools across the city.
(11)	The Caring Plymouth scrutiny panel should add to its work programme and scrutinise the issue of a possible increase in children being presented to GP surgeries with suspected symptoms of ADHD by parents with a view to being eligible for Disability Living Allowance. To also promote partnership working between GP surgeries and schools.

9. APPENDICES

A. FSM AND NON FSM STATISTICAL DATA

Appendix A

	KS2 2012 %									KS4 2012					
	L4+ English			L4+ Maths			L4+ in Maths and English			5 A*-C (Inc E/M)			5 A*-C		
	FSM	Non FSM	Gap	FSM	Non FSM	Gap	FSM	Non FSM	Gap	FSM	Non FSM	Gap	FSM	Non FSM	Gap
PLYMOUTH	72	87	15	75	87	12	65	82	17	34.1	61.3	27.2	73.9	86.5	12.6
Statistical Neighbours															
Portsmouth	65	85	20	64	85	21	55	79	24	28.1	56.6	28.5	53.7	77.9	24.2
Torbay	70	x		74	x		64	x		32.3	64.8	32.5	63	85.3	22.3
Southampton	71	87	16	70	87	17	62	82	20	32.4	58.8	26.4	70.7	84.4	13.7
Telford & Wrekin	68	90	22	67	86	19	60	83	23	37.3	66.1	28.8	70.8	89.6	18.8
Peterborough	67	84	17	66	83	17	58	78	20	18.6	54.3	35.7	64.3	86.3	22
South-end on sea	70	87	17	69	85	16	61	81	20	24.5	66.7	42.2	52.1	86.3	34.2
Bournemouth	65	87	22	70	85	15	61	81	20	31.1	65.1	34	58	82.8	24.8
Rotherham	64	85	21	65	85	20	56	80	24	33.4	64.6	31.2	63.9	87.3	23.4
Sheffield	68	86	18	71	86	15	63	81	18	30.3	60.3	30	57.5	80.6	23.1
Isle of Wight	69	86	17	64	82	18	58	78	20	23.2	47.7	24.5	46.3	75.6	29.3
Regional Neighbours															
Bath and North East Somerset	70	90	20	71	88	17	61	84	23	30.5	59.6	29.1	52.6	78.4	25.8
Bournemouth	65	87	22	70	85	15	61	81	20	31.1	65.1	34	58	82.8	24.8
Bristol	69	88	19	69	87	18	62	83	21	26.6	58.1	31.5	66.2	85.5	19.3
Cornwall	73	87	14	70	86	16	63	81	18	34.2	57.8	23.6	58.6	81.7	23.1
Devon	74	89	15	72	88	16	65	84	19	34.4	61	26.6	56.1	80.1	24
Dorset	69	88	19	69	87	18	59	82	23	25.2	56.6	31.4	50.4	78.5	28.1
Gloucestershire	73	91	18	72	88	16	64	85	21	32	64.6	32.6	56.5	83.9	27.4
North Somerset	71	88	17	76	87	11	64	82	18	30.5	61.6	31.1	56.7	83.5	26.8
Poole	66	86	20	68	85	17	59	81	22	39.8	60.5	20.7	66.2	81.7	15.5
Somerset	76	88	12	73	86	13	65	82	17	28.9	59.6	30.7	56.3	83	26.7
South Gloucestershire	68	88	20	71	88	17	60	83	23	32.7	58.2	25.5	59.2	83.3	24.1
Swindon	69	87	18	72	86	14	63	81	18	24	56.6	32.6	55.7	79.6	23.9
Torbay	70	x		74	x		64	x		32.3	64.8	32.5	63	85.3	22.3
Wiltshire	69	88	19	65	84	19	60	80	20	30	61.1	31.1	50.9	80.5	29.6