

Mayor's Universal Free School Meals



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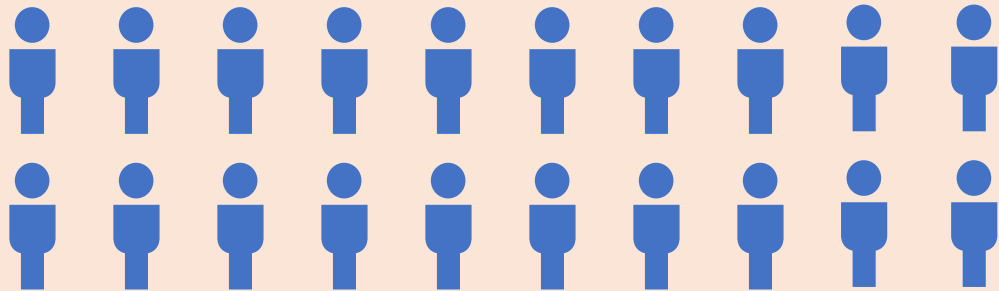


Mayor's Pledge

In May 2022, Tower Hamlets Mayor Lutfur Rahman made a manifesto pledge to provide Universal Free School Meals (UFSM's) to all KS3 & KS4 secondary pupils.



Why was this pledge made?



1st council in the UK to provide UFSM to ALL KS3 & KS4 Pupils (to help realise nutritional and academic benefits)

1st



On average, expected to save families £550 a year (helping with the cost-of-living crisis).

£550



Benefitting approximately 8,500 pupils per day.

8500



The journey of change

The journey of **change** to achieve the mayor's pledge.



Phase 3 (September 2023- onwards)

Activities include: Mobilisation of kitchens, schools go-live (mayor's launch, comms coverage), further monitoring and training/support for mobilisation issues and evaluation (meal take up, impact on students).



Phase 3



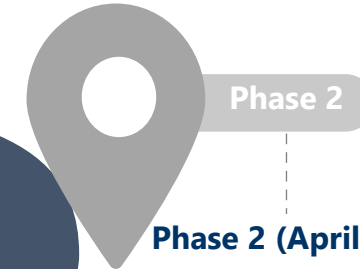
End

Phase 1 (January 2023 – April 2023)

Activities included: setting up a Project Board, undertaking 20 site surveys, compiling a cabinet report and identifying evaluation partners.



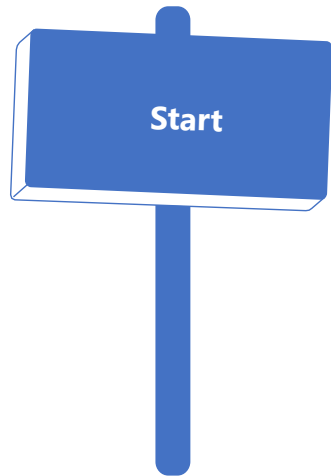
Phase 1



Phase 2

Phase 2 (April 2023 – September 2023)

Activities included: commissioning of equipment suppliers, conducting further site surveys, completing installations, developing a comms strategy and creating a toolkit for schools. There was continual headteacher engagement throughout this process.



Start



The impact of change

This is what some of our partners had to say about the launch of MUFSM:



“I am seeing students that have never eaten, eat a meal. I am seeing students that used to share a plate with friends or other family members, now do not have to share a meal”

“Behaviour has drastically improved. Students are no longer angry due to being hungry”

“There is a significant upturn in students taking meals.”

“Pupils are excited at the prospect of taking meals”

Quotes were taken from a range of different stakeholders including: headteachers, school caterers, lunchtime supervisors and students.



Early performance reports



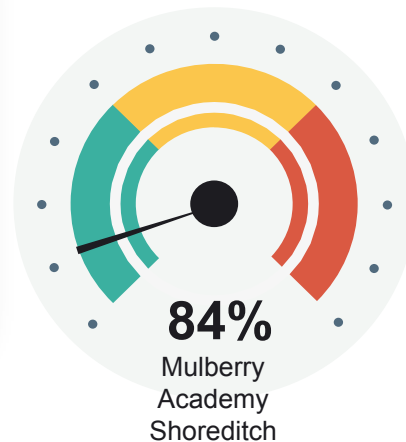
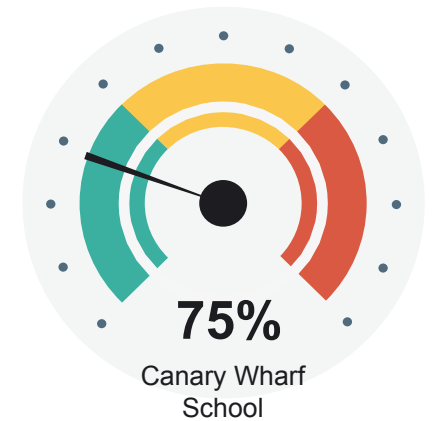
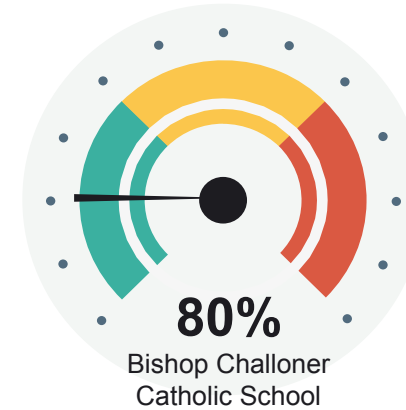
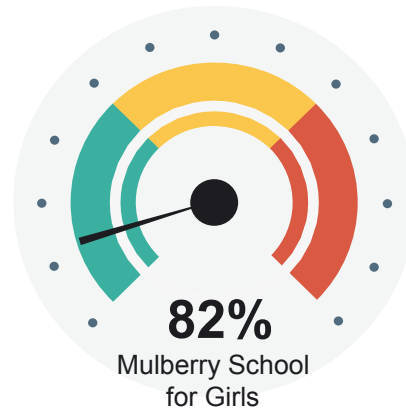
20/20

Eligible secondary schools receiving UFSM

16/16

Secondary schools received comprehensive equipment installations

Meal Take Up Performance (across schools)



Images show a POD and on-going installation works to a kitchen.

Performance Summary

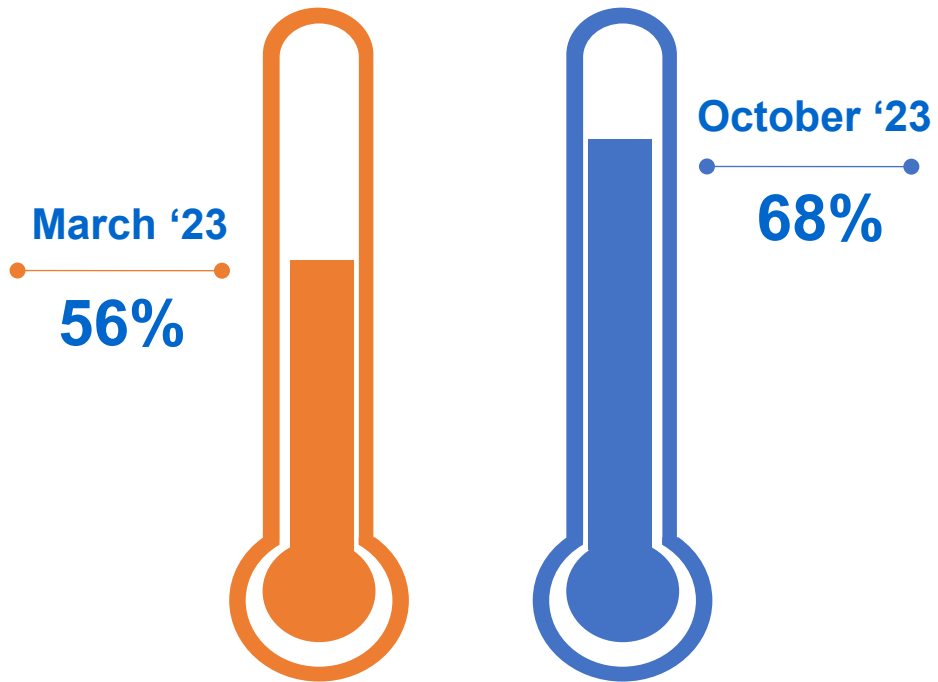
Early reports suggest that the MUFSM has been extremely well received by pupils and schools alike.

The meal uptake rate at many schools has seen a drastic uplift. Even across schools that have seen a relatively slower start, the rate is steadily increasing.

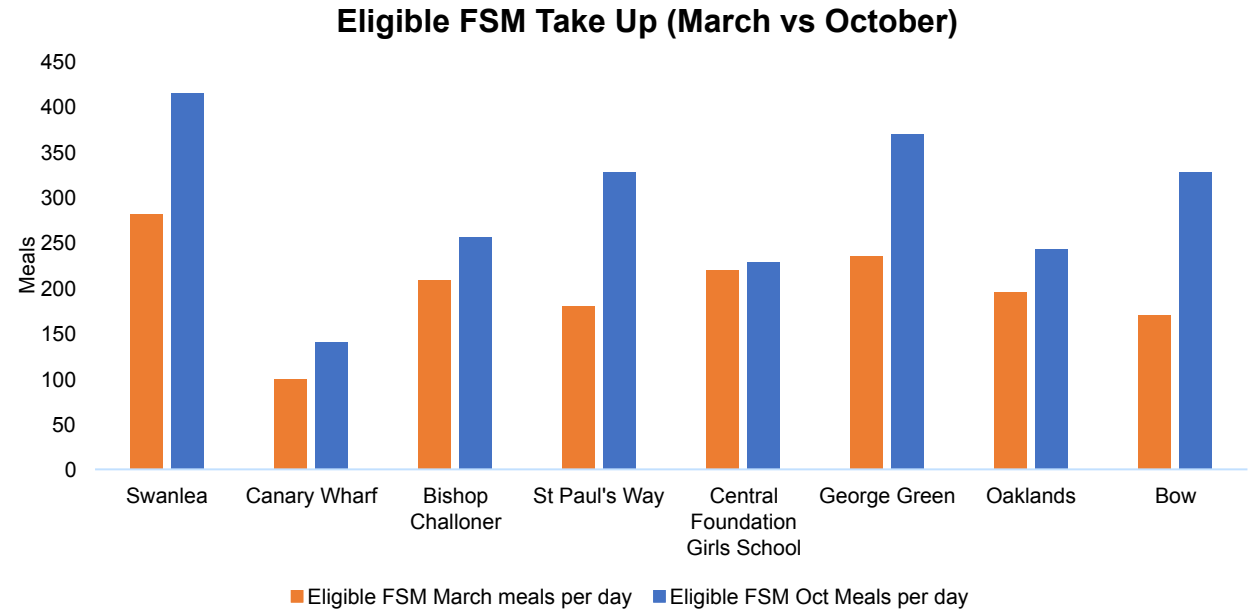
An on-going evaluation process is underway to assess the nutritional and educational benefits of free school meals.



Early performance reports



Total Average Meal Take Up Rates



So far, the above schools have seen an increase in meal take up after the launch of UFSM from among FSM eligible pupils.



This means there is likely a positive impact for children living in poverty



Project Evaluation



- Newcastle University working with three schools to understand dietary intake and food insecurity amongst pupils with plans to widen the evaluation in the new academic year
- Working with the Act Early Partnership (including QMUL) to expand the evaluation of the School Food Improvement Programme in primary schools to secondary schools
- As part of the Health Determinants Research Collaborative there are plans to explore how we better link council data to understand the impact of the new policy, including educational outcomes and child weight



A word from the project manager(s)



“

*Universal Free School Meals is one of Tower Hamlet's largest and most high-profile projects. National media eyes were focused on observing the outcome of the Mayor's pledge. But for us, the goal was simple: **children must eat.***

However, with any large and high-profile project comes several complex component parts and unexpected challenges (often from areas where you think you have things under control). But these were made easy to resolve as the fantastic project team were aligned with the mantra in mind: children must eat.

Everyone in the project team and our partners were always ready to go above and beyond to deliver. Very quickly we all realised this was not just another project, but something that could change the entire landscape of feeding children in the UK.

Through a combined effort we successfully delivered free school meals to all secondary schools in September 2023.

Badar Raja and Sayed Miah (Senior Transformation Project Mangers)



Universal Free School meals: Auto-enrolment and opt out process



Introduction

Auto-enrolment and opt out process

- Tower Hamlets is among the most deprived boroughs nationally, with more than half (56%) of children living in poverty in 2022.
- The council introduced Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) to address this issue.



The challenge

- The UFSMs policy had the potential to significantly reduce school funding.
- As all children would now receive council-funded meals, there would be fewer parents registering their child(ren) to receive benefits-related free school meals (FSMs).
- Schools receive additional funding (Pupil Premium) for each pupil registered for benefits-related FSMs.
- Fewer applications means less Pupil Premium funding for schools.



The solution

- Basis was commissioned to help set up a coordinated process to maximise registration of benefits-related FSM pupils and Pupil Premium funding.
- It was hypothesised that an opt-out process would increase uptake of benefits-related FSMs.
- If parents did not opt out, we could auto-enrol eligible pupils for benefits-related FSMs.



Project Team



The project team consisted of a collaboration of multiple services, including:

- Benefits
- Children Services
- Education
- Corporate Contact Centre
- Communications teams



The process involved...



- Data Protection Officers and consultation with legal officers
- Data matching, using pre-existing council data, to identify eligible families.
- ‘Opt out’ letters created based on checked pupils’ eligibility
- Finalised lists of pupils sent to schools to register pupils in time for the school census.



The outcome



- **Our hypothesis was correct**
- In total, 824 pupils had complete data records were registered increasing Pupil Premium funding for schools by an estimated £1,109,880.
- The process has significantly benefited the pupils, schools and the council.
- In addition to FSMs, registered pupils will receive further benefits (e.g. such as a uniform grant and holiday fund) and extra support from the Pupil Premium funding allocated to schools.
- The council now has a supported process to capture all entitled benefits-related FSM pupils.
- Finally, the core project team continued to work together to ensure that all pupils were correctly registered, and funding is fully allocated by the end of October 2023.

