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Sue Webber MSP
Convener
Education, Children and Young People Committee
T3.60
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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17 August 2023

Dear Convener,

Thank you for your letter of 18 July on behalf of the Committee. You asked for information about the provision of free breakfasts in schools and about the users of that provision. You also asked about plans to provide free breakfasts to children in primary and special schools.

Currently, breakfast provision in Scotland is delivered through a mixed model of local authority, private and voluntary services which may be delivered in-school or within wider community facilities. Individual schools and local authorities make their own decisions about the availability, delivery model and charges associated with these services, and some local authorities have made funding available to support the delivery of breakfast clubs in schools, helping reduce or remove the cost to parents requiring this service. However, as these services are offered, managed and funded at a local level, the Scottish Government does not collect data about the people who use them.

Further to the success of our expanded free school meal provision, the Scottish Government is keen to better understand the extent of existing breakfast provision across Scotland. We have been working with a range of stakeholders, including local authorities, Magic Breakfast, the Greggs Foundation and private sector organisations such as Kelloggs, to learn more about their data and research. In particular we have been looking closely at evaluations of existing breakfast projects. We also have regular discussions with the other UK nations, which include exploring the different types of breakfast offers available across the UK and sharing valuable learning.

Much of the data currently available about breakfast provision tends to be collected at a UK level, without the level of detail about demand and need which is required to understand what influences the offers available in different parts of Scotland. This is why we have been working to produce a survey for schools that will enable us to map current breakfast provision in Scotland and gather data to inform future service modelling.

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It is worth noting that, through our work to mitigate the ongoing cost of living crisis and to break the cycle of child poverty in Scotland, we know that focusing on one intervention alone is not the most effective way of bringing about lasting change. In terms of breakfast provision, we are also looking at how combining breakfast, childcare and other services can support families, in particular those on low incomes, and have begun work with local authorities and key stakeholders to better understand the impact that different models have on children and families.

Since 2022-23, we have been providing funding to four Early Adopting Communities (EAC) projects in Clackmannanshire, Dundee City, Glasgow City and Inverclyde Councils to support early delivery of person-centred and community-based school age childcare, designed to meet the needs and deliver to the six priority family types within those communities. This funding is targeted to support some of the most deprived communities in these local authority areas.

The projects are exploring how to deliver multiple supports to families to maximise the benefit of funding. Three of the EAC projects already include breakfast provision, with work underway to develop this further as projects expand into further communities. We will assess the impact of this breakfast provision as part of the wider EAC evaluation, which will in turn help to inform our plans for a national School Age Childcare policy.

We remain committed to ensuring that all children in primary and special schools in Scotland have access to breakfast if they need it, and that this is done in the most effective way which helps families to meet the rising costs of living. We seek to understand the gaps in that provision currently so that we can consider what more needs to be done to ensure that those children who need it are able to access a nutritious breakfast before school.

We will keep the Committee informed of progress and meantime I hope that this information sets out our work to date and provides helpful context.

Yours sincerely

JENNY GILRUTH

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