

Universal infant free school meals, Scotland: an evaluation

In 2015 the Scottish Government introduced universal free school meals for primary 1-3 (P1-3) pupils.

This policy had the potential to...

1 provide financial savings for families

2 provide nutritional benefits to children...

... as research suggests school meals are healthier than packed lunches



an average saving of...

£380

per child per year



In 2016

P1-3 free-school-meal uptake increased for the second year.



More than 4 in 5 P1-3 pupils took a free school meal

The proportion of all primary pupils taking a school meal (free or paid) also increased for the second year.



2 in every 3 primary pupil lunches were school meals

Free-school-meal uptake varied across schools and local authorities in Scotland.

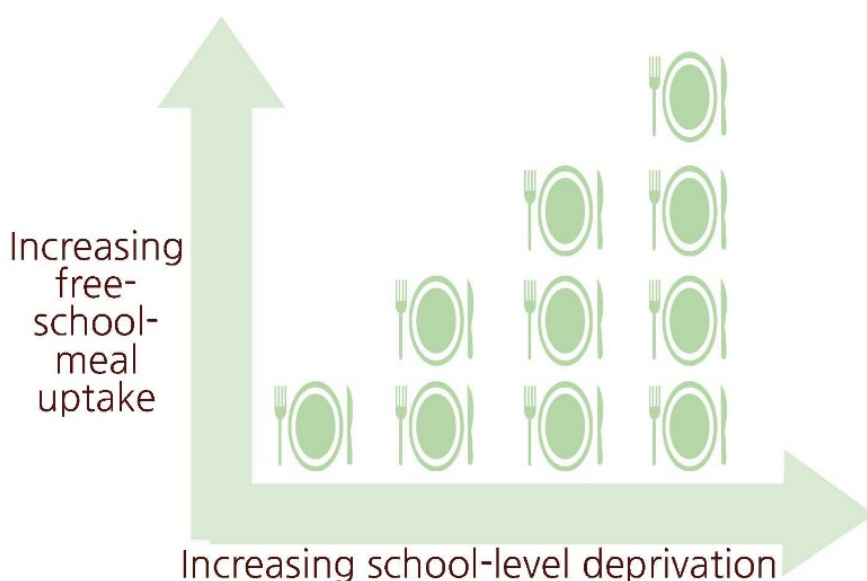
This means that the financial benefits were not evenly distributed across Scotland.



Free school meals and inequalities in Scotland, 2016.

Analysis shows the primary schools with the highest deprivation levels had the highest free-school-meal uptake...

...suggesting the most deprived families benefited the most from free meals.



Recommendations

Continued monitoring of school meal uptake data would allow:

- 1** assessment of the longer-term impact of universal infant free school meals on lunch choices of eligible children, especially after they move into primary 4
- 2** monitoring of the impact of universal infant free school meals on school-meal-uptake among older non-eligible primary pupils
- 3** identification of schools and local authorities with lower levels of free-school-meal uptake which may require support to increase uptake.

Find out more: healthscotland.com/freeschoolmeals