# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Pupil Development Grant (PDG)** |
| **DATE** | **26 October 2023** |
| **BY** | **Jeremy Miles MS, Minister for Education and Welsh Language** |

Tackling the impact of poverty on attainment is at the heart of [our national mission](https://www.gov.wales/our-national-mission) in education, and the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) has a key part to play in achieving this. The PDG is aimed at countering the effects of poverty on children and young people and funding allocations are delivered directly to schools and settings.

PDG funding is allocated based on the number of eFSM learners registered in each school in the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) for the preceding year. PDG allocations for 2023-24 are based on PLASC data from January 2022, and as a result will not have been affected by the rollout of Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM) which commenced in September 2022.

Preserving the eligibility for free school meals identifier as we continue with the rollout of UPFSM has been a key policy objective of the programme. It is essential to preserve the quality of the eFSM identifier to accurately inform our policies and to passport entitlements on a fair basis, for example PDG allocations for schools, and School Essentials Grant funding for eligible families. UPFSM forms part of the Co-operation Agreement between Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru.

In rolling out the universal offer my officials have worked with a range of partners to ensure we can continue to identify those children and families that would traditionally have been eligible for a free school meal through income or benefits-related criteria. As such it is our aim that the eFSM identifier, and associated data collected through PLASC, will be preserved going forward and can continue to be used to inform PDG funding allocations.

The ‘Get Help with School Costs’ communications campaign was launched in August 2022 to raise awareness of Universal Primary Free School Meals as well as the continuing need to register eligibility for free school meals. The campaign focused on raising awareness of the other benefits parents may be eligible for as a result of registration – for example the School Essentials Grant – to help families with the cost of the school day, and the additional PDG funding for a child’s school. Our omnibus survey conducted in May 2023 showed that in the past six months, the ‘Get Help with School Costs’ campaign supported an increase in parents’ awareness and understanding of free school meals.

By continuing to promote registration at school and setting level, the eFSM indicator should provide a reliable indication of the levels of socio-economic challenge being faced by a school/setting. We will keep this under review as rollout of the universal offer progresses, including additional verification and validation of school census data. Every year we perform additional validation to check eFSM data, including checking with local authority treasurers as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement. Following the January 2023 PLASC we have taken additional validation steps and worked with local authorities to look specifically at eligibility in reception, year 1 and year 2. There is no evidence to suggest that the rollout of UPFSM has had a detrimental impact on the quality of the data. We will continue to work closely with partners and remain vigilant in the future to ensure the continued quality of the data post-rollout.

We are also taking forward research to review the way in which we consider socio-economic factors amongst learners, their impact on outcomes, and the use of such data to inform the targeting of funding and support. This is in response to the shifting landscape around our existing socio-economic deprivation proxy as well as the wider reform in curriculum and school improvement. Whilst historically we have used the eFSM data for multiple purposes, we are keen to ensure that the way we use such data considers the varying and different needs within the school system and amongst stakeholders, and balances this with the need for consistency and transparency.