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## Free School Meals and Pupil Premium Guarantee

### Background

With effect from September 2014, the then Coalition Government legislated that all Reception and Key Stage 1 pupils attending State funded schools in England should receive a free, nutritious hot meal at lunchtimes. Government funding would be used to reimburse schools for the cost of providing the meals and the stated objective was to improve academic attainment and save families money.

The free school meals initiative was introduced alongside existing Pupil Premium funding available to schools to support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Historically, schools had accessed the Pupil Premium by identifying those who had been designated eligible to receive free school meals. By providing free schools meals to all Reception and KS1 pupils, disadvantaged families would no longer have to claim to receive them, hence many would not bother and schools would find it difficult to identify those eligible for Pupil Premium funding.

In times when schools' budgets were severely under pressure, this represented a significant threat to their finances.

### Hoople's Pupil Premium Guarantee Service

For many years, Hoople's Revenues and Benefits team has supported Herefordshire schools and academies by processing their free school meals applications. Therefore, when the new universal infant free school meals legislation was mooted, the team could foresee the implications for schools' budgets.

Faced with the risk of being unable to identify those eligible for Pupil Premium funding (as described above) schools were faced with having to chase up potentially eligible parents to fill in an application form, creating an additional administrative burden on already stretched staff. Even if they could allocate the personnel to undertake this task, Hoople predicted that they would receive a reduced number of applications – and hence Pupil Premium – compared to previous years. Added to which, it was well known that all those eligible for free school meals in previous years had not claimed them for a number of reasons – again affecting the amount of Pupil Premium that the school could draw down.

With all this in mind, in the spring of 2014, the Hoople team developed a new Pupil Premium Guarantee Service



for offer to Herefordshire schools and academies. The service proposed that schools send out a revised free school meals application form to all parents of Reception and KS1 pupils, regardless of their personal circumstances. These forms could then be returned to Hoople for processing in time to be included in the year's census data to Government, ensuring timely payment of all Pupil Premium funding.

### Results

In the summer of 2014, Hoople undertook assessment of over 2,000 pupils from 46 Herefordshire schools to determine eligibility for the Pupil Premium. From these, 216 children were identified as being entitled, drawing down a share of an additional £280,800 of funding for the schools concerned. Twenty-six per cent of those judged to be eligible for the Pupil Premium had not previously been registered as such.

The cost of utilising the service was found by most schools and academies to have been far outweighed by the benefits received. For example, Leominster Primary School Bursar, Sandra Beaumont-Pike, said: "The exercise has

resulted in an additional 16 children being identified as eligible for free school meals, which means a large amount of additional funding for our school."

One year on, for the academic year 2015/16 all Herefordshire schools and academies were again offered the service. For those that had participated in 2014/15, the service could be provided more cheaply as schools only needed to ask parents of reception class children, and those in KS1 who had joined the school since the previous exercise had been completed, to fill in the application form. Some did, however, choose to check all the pupils' families again just in case circumstances had changed.

For the academic year 2015/16, 48 schools elected to join the service with a total of 181 children being identified from these applications as eligible to receive the Pupil Premium, drawing down a share of an additional £238,920 for the participating schools and academies.

Marlbrook Primary School in Hereford was one of the beneficiaries of this year's service. Read below how the Head felt that the school benefited.

### Testimonial

Tracey Kneale, Head Teacher at Marlbrook school, said: "Hoople have been a tremendous help to us. Not only have they taken away the administrative burden of sourcing this stream of pupil premium funding I can also feel confident that all the children in our schools entitled to free school meals, and that extra money, are getting it.

"I have also been very impressed with the continuous support my team and I have received. There is always someone on the end of the phone throughout the year if we have any queries with our FSM funding and there is always accurate information to hand. It's a service we shall definitely use again."

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