

# Report to councillors from the East Sussex Governor Forum

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- 1) ESGF Chair networking has taken place. Governors reported back “Mental health is on the forefront of governors’ minds. There is an increasing pressure in schools for headteachers. Especially challenge from governors.”

The notes show that this was a very mutually supportive session. Governors were able to be frank and get support in setting appropriate boundaries, and to provide appropriate professional support.

- 2) Jessica Stubbings presented to the ESGF on the ASEND improvement plan, which was written in April 2025 in response to the Area SEND review (ASEND), which took place in November 2024.

We noted the existence of the SEND Strategy governance board and that stakeholders from many different areas sit on the board. Governors wondered what councillors’ visibility of the board and plan were, and how progress was being reported. ESGF asked that the information be shared with governors more generally, as it seemed there were some good intentions. But there would be a requirement for cultural change. There was a need to work with many different agencies.

- 3) Universal Infant Free School Meals update: DK has written to one MP as a test to see what the response is – ESCC covers about half a dozen constituencies, but we can only write to our own MP. *See Appendix 1.*
- 4) OFSTED consultation – the ESGF ran a session where a facilitator who has an OFSTED background volunteered their time to lead a session. We took notes and submitted a joint response to the OFSTED consultation. We await the response from OFSTED. DK also attended the NGA session (ESGF members are able to attend NGA events) and found it informative regarding OFSTED’s intent to better support leaders’ and teachers’ mental health.
- 5) The Food Partnership have run a series of events to try to get schools and farms linked. A pilot may be starting in the Ringmer area. Many different stakeholders, including governors, were invited to be involved.

## Appendix 1 – Letter to MP re Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM)

Dear James

I am writing to MPs on behalf of the school governors in the Lewes constituency. I am the chair of the East Sussex Governor Forum, the association of school governors in East Sussex.

There has been discussion recently among governors at the Lewes area network about the cost of Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM). There was recently an increase of 3p in the amount of funding for an UIFSM, from £2.58 to £2.61, a 1.2% rise. The cost of providing a meal is estimated to average £2.91.

Governors are aware that there is a theoretical argument for the funding per meal being lower than the amount that schools are charged, based on census numbers. However, the reality is that schools are having to subsidise their children's UIFSMs, which they are obliged to provide.

2025 research from the School Food Review charity has found that the provision of free school meals had many benefits. [https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-03/FSM%20Evidence%20Pack\\_A4\\_2025\\_FINAL.pdf](https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-03/FSM%20Evidence%20Pack_A4_2025_FINAL.pdf)

For example,

- Boosting attainment and attendance, thus increasing a child's lifetime earnings
- Improving nutrition and helping combat childhood obesity, saving the NHS money in the long term

We would like to make MPs aware of the burden that is being put on schools as they try to provide the best start for their infant pupils. Is there anything that you can do to help address this?

Yours sincerely

Denise Kong