AGENDA ITEM 4

**Title of report: Schools Census and Early Years Data Checks**

**Author of the paper: Nikki Parsons**

**Officer to present the paper to Schools Forum: Nikki Parsons**

**Details on who has been consulted with on this paper to date: n/a**

## Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the financial data checking process undertaken by the Local Authority of the termly Schools Census and Early Years data collections, to identify potential errors which could lead to subsequent funding implications for schools and academies

## Details of recommendations and timescales for decisions

Schools Forum are invited to note and comment on the contents of this report

## Background

* 1. The School Census is a statutory return and is a collection of pupil data from primary, secondary, special schools and pupil referral units, which takes place three times a year (Autumn, Spring and Summer).
  2. The level of data collected is detailed, including personal data on each pupil, educational data and other relevant factors such as absences and exclusions.
  3. The purpose of the school census is so that authorities can make better-informed decisions around funding for individual schools by taking account of pupil and school specific factors.
  4. The October census is generally used to inform the Schools Block funding for the year ahead and the core funding allocated to each school/academy is on a per-pupil basis, taking into account societal factors such as free school meals and deprivation.
  5. EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) funding supports better education for pupils aged between two and four. Data from the spring census is used for the initial allocation, with the early years census providing the definitive numbers for the remainder of funding each term.

1. **Autumn Census Data Collection**
   1. The Autumn School Census date was Thursday 6 October 2022.
   2. Schools were required to amend and update all their pupil data on their management information systems and then export and upload the data onto the DfE’s COLLECT portal. The Local Authority (LA) deadline for submissions via COLLECT for all maintained schools was Thursday 13th October 2022.
   3. Schools are responsible for ensuring that they resolve any missing data and associated errors and queries during the upload process, ready to be checked and approved by the LA, for the DfE to authorise.
   4. Initial checks are undertaken by the LA’s Data and Performance Analytics Team (Children & Culture Directorate) to ensure all schools have submitted a return and that all errors have been cleared and query notes have been added. A service redesign earlier in the year, means there is limited capacity to undertake detailed pupil data checks. As with all areas across the Council, the expectation is that data ownership and responsibility sits with the service area.
2. **Financial Sense Checks**
   1. Once the Census data has been submitted onto COLLECT, the Schools Finance Team run a series of reports from the loaded data by all schools, to undertake a number of sense checks on any material financial implications for individual schools.
   2. Significant variances are flagged and raised with schools, to check that the data is in line with their expectations. During this process, a number of errors/queries were identified and subsequently corrected in the Schools and Early Years data.
   3. A summary of these checks and subsequent findings is provided below with the potential financial impact for individual schools had these issues not been highlighted and addressed, which Schools Forum are invited to note and comment on.

**Pupils on Roll by Establishment Report**

* 1. Initially 8 maintained schools had not submitted any pupil data by the LA deadline, and this was followed up with the School Business Managers (SBMs).
  2. 1 school had unresolved errors which led to a delay in their reporting.
  3. 1 school confirmed that the material change in their numbers on roll (NOR) was due to their increasing form entry moving up through the school.

## Zero Funded Hours Report

* 1. The report highlights the number of Early Years pupils who have ‘zero’ funded hours recorded on the school census return.
  2. 3 schools appeared on this report and the SBMs were contacted to check the data was as expected
  3. 1 of these schools were reporting all of their 43 pupils as unfunded which was due to a coding error that was subsequently corrected. This could have cost the school £62k of Early Years funding had the error not been picked up.

## Pupil Numbers Report

* 1. This report provides a headcount of pupils by NC year group that are used in numerous funding streams. A detailed check was undertaken for the Early Years data.
  2. 4 maintained schools were not reporting any Early Years data correctly. This could have affected the funding allocated for a total of 329 children across the universal and extended hours provision and a potential combined shortfall of £470k across those schools.
  3. 7 academies were also identified as reporting no Early Years data and were contacted to reconfirm their data on COLLECT before the statutory deadline.
  4. 11 maintained schools were contacted to check that the sizeable downturn in their reported Early Years pupil numbers were as per their expectations

## Free School Meals (FSM), Universal Infants Free School Meals (UIFSM) and Pupil Premium (PP) Reports

* 1. Sense checks were conducted on whether schools FSM eligibility data was in line with their NOR variation from the prior year.
  2. 2 schools were contacted to check that the significant decreases in their UIFSM data was as per their expectations.
  3. 21 schools were contacted to check their reported pupils eligible for deprivation PP funding for the autumn census period of eligibility only were as per their expectations.