

Appendix A – School Food Plan and actions by Headteachers

What you have in your hands (or on your screen) is not a traditional ‘report’, or a set of recommendations to the government. It is a plan. It contains a series of actions, each of which is the responsibility of a named person or organisation. These are the things that need to happen to transform what children eat at school, and how they learn about food.

Below, we have given a very condensed list of these actions. We heartily recommend that you read the whole plan to get a better sense of the purpose behind them. In the meantime, there are a few essential points that need making.

Increasing take-up is not something that can be done from the top-down. It requires a cultural change within each school. It means cooking food that is both appetising and nutritious; making the dining hall a welcoming place; keeping queues down; getting the price right; allowing children to eat with their friends; getting them interested in cooking and growing.

The only person with the power to orchestrate all this is the head teacher. They need support from their governors and leadership team, but if the head isn’t behind changing the food culture in a school, it won’t happen.

The vast majority of head teachers already believe that good food is vital to children’s health and academic achievement, and to the broader life of the school. But many feel they lack the knowledge and experience to improve their food culture. So this plan is aimed primarily at giving head teachers the practical support, advice and information they need.

We have put together a ‘checklist for head teachers’: a brief guide to the practical steps every school can take to improve the quality and take-up of its food. This includes everything from chucking out prison-style trays and getting teachers to eat in the dining hall, to banning packed lunches (it *can* be done!). The checklist can be found at the end of the plan.

The government has agreed to provide funding for specialist organisations to go into 5,000 schools that are struggling with their lunch service, to help them turn things around. Boris Johnson has also agreed to create flagship ‘food boroughs’ in London, with more areas to follow if these are successful.

Separately, we have set up a taskforce to help small schools overcome their particular logistical difficulties, and drawn up a strategy to improve the skills and morale of school caterers.

Many studies have shown that hunger affects concentration, and that well-nourished children fare better at school. The government has agreed to allocate money to help schools in the poorest areas establish breakfast clubs. And it has promised to look at extending free school meal entitlement, to ensure that the children of the so-called ‘working poor’ do not go hungry at lunch.

We have also recommended that free school meals should be extended to all primary school children, starting with the most deprived areas. This is the only one of our recommendations that the government has not agreed to yet. We understand that the considerable cost and the need to involve other departments make it a big ask. But we are pleased that the Secretary of State agrees with us in principle and we would urge schools and councils to consider funding universal free school meals themselves.

Providing a wholesome lunch for children is only half the battle. We also need to equip today's children with the skills they need to feed themselves – and, in time, their own children.

We are delighted that the government has accepted our recommendation that cooking lessons should be made a part of the national curriculum for all children up to the age of 14. The new curriculum will emphasise the importance of cooking nutritious, savoury dishes, understanding where food comes from, and taking pleasure in the creative arts of the kitchen.

Finally, many people have been concerned by the government's decision to exempt most academies and free schools from the existing school food standards. The fear is that, without legal constraints on what they serve, these schools will be tempted to slide into bad habits. We have not found any evidence of widespread slippage – indeed, some of the best food we have eaten has been in academies.

However, we do believe it is wise to have some sort of safety net in place. To that end we have worked with the Medical Research Council and our own expert panel to develop a set of simpler food standards, which we believe will be easier to implement and enforce. If the new standards are agreed to be effective from a practical and nutritional standpoint, the Secretary of State has agreed to make them mandatory across all types of school.

In the past year, we have seen many different people from across the school food sector – and beyond – coming together to help build on the good work that has been done already. Michael Gove, Sir Michael Wilshaw (head of Ofsted), the Department of Health, Public Health England, Jamie Oliver, charitable organisations and representatives from all the major school food providers – from private industry to local authority caterers – have agreed to do their bit to increase take-up and create a truly first class school food service.

Good food provision in schools has been shown to lead not only to healthier children, but to improved attainment. We hope this plan will help to create a generation of children who enjoy food that makes them healthier, more successful and, most importantly, happier.

Henry Dimbleby and John Vincent

Actions for head teachers

*Head teachers are the only people who can truly lead the revolution in school food. We have provided a **checklist for head teachers** to help them start to turn round their food service – or nudge it from good to great. It can be found at the end of the School Food Plan.*

A CHECKLIST FOR HEAD TEACHERS

We know how busy schools are. The idea of turning round your food service – or merely nudging it from good to great – may seem daunting. So we want to make it as easy as possible for you. What follows is a checklist of all the things we know make a big difference to take-up and food culture in schools.

Obviously, not all of these actions are your responsibility; they can be shared across the school. Some are best done by the school cook, business manager, senior management team, or your external catering company.

This checklist is designed to be printed out and pinned up in your office, in the office of your business manager and in the school kitchen.

We have categorised the actions based on the things we have observed that all schools with a good food culture do well:

1. They concentrate on the things children care about: good food, attractive environment, social life, price, and brand.
2. They adopt what is often called a 'whole-school approach'. This is a simple idea, but an important one. It means treating the dining hall as an integral part of the school, where children *and* teachers eat; lunch as part of the school day; the cooks as important staff members; and food as a vital element of school life.
3. They have a head teacher who leads the change.

1. Give children what they care about

A. Food

- Eat in the canteen often. Ask yourself whether the food looks appetising and tastes good.
- Be sure there is a mix of familiar and new foods for the children, and that the catering staff encourage children to experiment.
- Use local and seasonal suppliers, and make a song and dance about it. Children and their parents find the idea of local produce exciting (especially when it comes from the school garden), and are more likely to try it. On fish, avoid the worst (Marine Conservation Society red list), and promote the best (MCS green list which includes Marine Stewardship Council certified fish).
- Manage children's choices to ensure they get a balanced meal, instead of stuffing themselves full of bread rolls. Offer a cheaper 'set menu' meal; require children to fill their plates with options from different categories; or simply put vegetables on their plates.
- Make sure packed lunches are not a 'better' option. Ban sugary drinks, crisps and confectionery, or offer prizes and other incentives for bringing in a healthy lunch. Some schools ban packed lunches outright. If you want to do this, try starting with your newest intake (pupils in reception or year 7). The ban will then apply to all the years that follow them, until it extends to the whole school.
- Watch what gets served at mid-morning break. Many children eat their main meal at this time. Too often, that means filling up on pizza, paninis or cake.
- Ensure tap water is widely available at all times, make it the drink of choice across the school and encourage all children to keep well hydrated.

B. Environment

- Look around your dining hall. Is the room clean and attractive? Does it smell good?

- Keep queuing times short. Try staggering lunch breaks; introducing more service points; serving food at the table, family-style; and reducing choice.
- Have a cashless payment system. This shortens queuing times, enables parents to go online to see what their children are eating, and prevents FSM children being stigmatised.
- Replace prison-style trays with proper crockery.

C. Social life

- Have a stay-on-site rule for break and lunch time.
- Allow all children to sit together – don't segregate those with packed lunches.
- Structure the lunch break so there is sufficient time for eating as well as activities or clubs. This may mean making the lunch break longer or timing the clubs differently.
- Give special consideration to the youngest children at secondary schools, who might be intimidated by the noise and rush of lunch break.

D. Get the price right

- Consider subsidising school meals for your reception, year 1 or year 7 classes for the first term. Children who start eating school lunches often carry on, even once they have to pay.
- Offer lunch discounts for parents with more than one child at the school, or whose children eat a school lunch every day.

E. Improve the brand

- Encourage teachers to eat in the dining room with the children. It may require a cultural or logistical shift, but *every single* good school we visited did this. It has a unifying effect on the whole school, and raises the status of school meals.
- Make menus available in advance to children and parents online.
- Offer samples of the food for children to taste.
- Hold themed events – such as World Cup day, or international food day – to get the children excited.
- Organise a group to represent children's views on school lunch, such as a school nutrition action group (SNAG) or a School Council.
- Give children opportunities to prepare, cook or serve the food.

2. Adopt a ‘whole school’ approach

- Treat lunchtime as part of the school day, your canteen as an extra classroom and your cooks and lunchtime supervisors as key members of staff, on a par with teachers and business managers. Do they come to staff meetings? Do they enter and leave by the same door as the rest of your staff? Have they received training and development recently?
- Bring your school cook to parents’ evenings – not to serve the food, but to answer questions from parents about their children’s eating habits.
- Make sure children get consistent messages about nutrition in lessons and at lunchtime.
- Choose classroom rewards for children that are not sweets.
- Grow food in your school, and use some in the school lunch.
- Use cooking and growing as an exciting way to teach subjects across the curriculum – from history to maths, science to enterprise, technology to geography.
- Offer after school cooking lessons for parents and children.

3. Leadership

A. Get the community involved

- Give parents, carers and grandparents the opportunity to taste school food and eat with the children at lunchtime and/or parents’ evenings.
- Invite family members to help with cooking or gardening clubs.
- Seek out partners in the community who can help with cooking and growing activities, e.g. local restaurants, food producers, allotment growers.
- Get local chefs in to teach in your school.

B. Get the right contract - drawing up a new contract is a risky time for your school food service, but also a moment of opportunity

- Don’t draw up a new contract alone – lots of other schools have done this before you, and found ways to get a good deal. Use an expert to help you draft it.
- Ask your caterer to draw up a clear, written plan for increasing take-up over a set period.
- Make it a contractual requirement for your caterer to achieve a certain standard of quality, as judged by an external organisation – e.g. Food for Life Partnership or Children’s Food Trust.
- Get specialist help. For details of organisations that can help you with contracts, cookery lessons, gardening or any other aspect of this checklist, go to our website: www.schoolfoodplan.com.