

The School Food Plan

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Our Expert Panel

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Summary

If you only have five minutes, read this.

This plan is about good food and happiness. It is about the pleasures of growing, cooking and eating proper food. It is also about improving the academic performance of our children and the health of our nation.

What we found

The quality of food in England's schools has improved enormously since 2005, when Jamie Oliver alerted the nation to the horrors of the Turkey Twizzler. There has been a clear, measurable improvement in the nutritional quality of most school food, and a reduction in junk foods.

The best schools do a brilliant job of weaving food education – cooking, growing vegetables, even modest efforts at animal husbandry – into school life and the curriculum. We have been hugely impressed by the energy and enthusiasm we have witnessed among school cooks, caterers, teachers, nutritionists, parents, volunteers, charity workers and many others working to make school food great.

But there is still work to be done. Some schools are lagging behind, serving food that is much too bland, boring and beige. Across the country, take-up of school food remains stubbornly low, at 43%. That means that 57% of children are not eating school lunches at all. Some graze instead on snack foods served at mid-morning break (when the standard offerings in our experience are panini, pizza and cake). Others go off-site to buy their lunch – usually junk food - or bring in a packed lunch.

Many parents mistakenly imagine that a packed lunch is the healthiest option. In fact, it is far easier to get the necessary nutrients into a cooked meal – even one of mediocre quality. Only 1% of packed lunches meet the nutritional standards that currently apply to school food.

This country faces a serious health crisis caused by bad diet. Almost 20% of children are obese by the time they leave primary school at 11. Diet-related illnesses are putting a huge strain on the nation's coffers – costing the NHS £10 billion every year. We need to tackle the problem now, before the costs (both personal and financial) become too heavy to bear.

Eating school dinners is better for children. It is also better for the school's finances. A half-empty dining hall – like a half-empty restaurant – is certain to lose money. In order for the school food service to break even, average take-up needs to get above 50%. In other words, the system is currently bust. It has to be subsidised with money from school budgets and local councils, to the tune of £140 million a year.

This state of affairs is neither desirable nor necessary. Parents currently spend almost £1 billion a year on packed lunches; persuading just a fraction of them to switch to school food would make the system solvent again (and their children healthier).

What needs to be done

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

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.*

Actions for government

1. Put cooking into the curriculum: make cooking and food an entitlement in key stages 1 to 3

The Department for Education has incorporated this into the new national curriculum, published on 8th July, 2013. See Chapter Two for details.

2. Introduce food-based standards for all schools

The Department for Education will test and introduce a set of revised food based standards (built on a nutritional framework), with the intention of applying them to maintained schools and all new academies and free schools by September 2014. See Chapter Eight for details.

3. Kick-start increased take-up of good school food

The Department for Education will provide £11.8 million of seed funding over the next two years – to enable independent experts to work with schools to increase their take-up and help them break-even. See Chapter Four for details.

4. Set up financially self-sufficient breakfast clubs

The Department for Education will provide £3.15 million over the next two years to increase healthy breakfast provision for children who are arriving at school hungry. See Chapter Ten for details.

5. Set up flagship boroughs to demonstrate the impact of improving school food on a large scale

The Department for Education and London Mayor's Office will jointly fund and manage two flagship boroughs. See Chapter Five for details.

6. Investigate the case for extending free school meals entitlement

The Department for Education will lead this, working with the rest of government. See Chapter Ten for details.

7. Train head teachers: include food and nutrition in head teacher training

The National College for Teaching and Leadership has agreed that content on food and nutrition should be included in their head teacher programme. See Chapter Six for details.

8. Public Health England will promote policies which improve children's diets in schools

Public Health England has agreed to promote interventions which improve food quality in schools and tackle childhood obesity. See Chapter Six for details.

9. Ofsted inspectors to consider behaviour and culture in the dining hall and the way a school promotes healthy lifestyles

Ofsted has agreed to amend its guidance for school inspectors. See Chapter Twelve for details.

10. Measure success – set up and monitor five measures to test whether the School Food Plan is working

The Department for Education will collect this data. See Chapter Twelve for details.

Actions for us and others

11. Share 'What Works Well' on a new website, to enable schools to learn from each other

We will oversee the development of the new website, hosted at www.schoolfoodplan.com. See Chapter Five for details.

12. Improve the image of school food

We want parents to realise that school lunches are better than they used to be – and much healthier for their children than the alternatives. Richard Reed, co-founder of Innocent smoothies, and the branding expert Wally Olins have agreed to help devise a strategy for spreading the word. Jamie Oliver has agreed to help with this through his work in different media (TV, magazines and social media). See Chapter Three for details.

13. Bring school cooks closer to the rest of the catering sector

We will work with 'Lunch' and 'Hotelympia' to include school cooks in these high-profile industry events. See Chapter Seven for details.

14. Improve the skills of the workforce

A public-private alliance led by LACA will develop a more structured approach to training and qualifications for school caterers. See Chapter Seven for details.

- 15.** Small school taskforce – caterers, kitchen designers and manufacturers to work together to provide good food for small school

We will lead this taskforce, working with Annabel Karmel, CEDA, LACA, Brakes and others. See Chapter Nine for details.

- 16.** Ensure small schools are fairly funded

We will write to local authorities personally to let them know what we think would be an appropriate amount to fund food services in small rural schools. See Chapter Nine for details.

Recommendation for government

- 17.** The government should embark upon a phased roll out of free school meals for all primary school children, beginning with the local authorities with the highest percentage of children already eligible for free school meals

This is the only recommendation in this plan that the government has not agreed to implement immediately. We hope that, at the very least, the subject will be debated further across government departments and by people working in the field. We would also strongly encourage councils to follow the lead of Islington, Newham and Blackpool councils and consider funding this themselves. See Chapter Eleven for details.

Foreword

The first thing we did when we were asked to put together this plan was to get on a train and visit a school. Over the past year, we have been to – and eaten in – more than 60 schools all over England, and heard from hundreds more. We have spoken to children, teachers, parents, cooks, caterers, nutritionists, volunteers and charity workers, and industry bodies, many of them doing amazing work to improve the quality of school food. We have read the reports and papers that have been written on various aspects of school food, commissioned our own research, and taken a thorough look under the bonnet to understand the structure and economics of the service.

The picture that has emerged is far more positive than we had expected. We have a school food service that feeds 3.1 million children a day¹ – equivalent to the population of Buenos Aires, and three times the number of children served in Finnish schools², which are often held up as an example of global excellence.

The food in most schools is miles better than it was eight years ago. There has been a steep reduction in junk foods³ and most of the dishes served at lunch are freshly cooked and nutritious – far more so than the average packed lunch. Most children really enjoy their school lunches, too. In a survey we conducted with the Sunday Times, 77% of children described their school food as either tasty or very tasty.

¹ OC&C analysis based on findings in: Michael Nelson, Jo Nicholas, Katy Riley, Lesley Wood, *Seventh Annual survey of take-up and school food in England*, School Food Trust, July 2012

² According to the 2010 Census in Argentina (http://www.censo2010.indec.gov.ar/preliminares/cuadro_totalpais.asp), and *Statistics Finland* (http://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto_en.html)

³ For example, see *Secondary Schools Food Survey 2011*, School Food Trust, which found that meals eaten in 2011 had nearly 50% more Vitamin A and at least 30% less fat, saturated fat, sodium and sugars compared with 2004.

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Our brief

Our brief was to answer two questions:

1. How do we get our children eating well in school?
 - a. What more needs to be done to make tasty, nutritious food available to all school children?
 - b. How do we excite children about food so that they want to eat it?
2. What role should cooking and food play more broadly in schools, to enrich children's home lives and leave a legacy for later life?

Our scope was limited to England. We were asked to consider primary and secondary schools, but not special schools or early years.

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What we have done

- Held over 100 meetings with experts, representative groups and organisations working with schools to improve their food culture
- Organised seven regional events around England, attended by nearly 500 people and representatives from over 150 schools
- Visited more than 60 schools to eat their food, attend lessons and discuss issues with children, parents, cooks, teachers, business managers, teachers and heads
- Held 20 focus groups with children
- Convened an expert panel to develop the plan
- Commissioned primary research, such as a representative survey of 400 head teachers' views on school food
- Analysed previously unseen data on what more than 15,000 children are actually choosing and eating for lunch
- Invited views from everyone and read over 1,500 letters and submissions from schools and members of the public
- Worked with two national newspapers (The Sun and The Sunday Times) to run campaigns which spread the good news about the improvements in school food, and encouraged feedback from children and parents
- Read research on school food from around the world
- Conducted detailed research and new quantitative and qualitative analysis on:
 - Why it matters – links between good nutrition and academic performance and health
 - What works well – in the UK and internationally
 - The supply chain economics
 - Economic analysis of individual schools
 - What parents and children want
- Spoken at 17 events and conferences, and discussed school food issues with delegates

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For the first time in four decades, take-up of school food is rising. It is now 43% overall—up by 7% in the past three years⁴. This is despite the fact that parents often underestimate its quality (bad memories of their own school dinners still linger). Progress is more marked in primary schools, although this is having a knock-on effect. Incredulous cooks told us of children arriving at secondary schools “actually asking for vegetables”. There are still places where a lot remains to be done. At a secondary school in the North East we had lunch at a table of school prefects. The head boy was eating a breaded chicken cutlet in a white roll. The head girl had nothing but two Yorkshire puddings on her plate. When we talked to them about the benefits of a balanced diet – how the right kind of food could help them concentrate, boost their sporting performance or improve their skin – you could practically see the light bulbs switching on above their heads. These were clever children, but they had never previously thought of food as anything but a means to preventing hunger (or as a ‘treat’).

We also found that the food served at mid-morning break is generally much less wholesome than at lunch. This really matters, because many children eat their main meal of the day at this time, leaving their lunch break free for clubs and other activities. A typical mid-morning break menu might include pizza, panini, sausage rolls and cake – an almost entirely beige array of refined carbohydrates, laced with sugar and bad fats.

But for every school that is lagging behind, we have seen an outstanding one.

* * *

Carshalton Boys Sports College, in Sutton, is not blessed with a great location. A large aerial photo in the headmaster’s office shows the academy as a tiny rectangle in the middle of a red brick estate that sprawls to the edge of the frame in every direction. It is one of the largest estates in Europe. A massive 40% of the school’s children are eligible for free school meals.

When Simon Barber took over the school ten years ago, only 4% of children managed to meet the academic benchmark of five GCSEs at A* to C grades including English and maths. The atmosphere and the discipline were terrible. School dinners weren’t just bad: they were virtually non-existent. Children were actually locked out of the main school building for the duration of the lunch break, to give the teachers a break from the mayhem.

Simon’s genius was to realise that the canteen ought to be the centre of school life. It was the one place where the whole school could meet in an informal setting: where teachers and children could sit down together to eat and talk, and in doing so cultivate a happier atmosphere. He understood the importance of table manners, not as a snobbish display of gentility, but as a means of teaching consideration, courtesy and social skills.

So having driven children from the dining hall for so long, how did Carshalton woo them back? The answer was to hire an experienced restaurant chef, Dave Holdsworth, and to compete directly with the local fast food outlets for the custom of older

⁴ Latest figures for 2011-12 show average take-up in primary schools was 46.3% (an increase of 7 % pts from 39.3% in 2008-09). In secondary schools it was 39.8% (an increase of 4% pts from 35% in 2008-09). Source: Michael Nelson, Jo Nicholas, Katy Riley, Lesley Wood, *Seventh Annual survey of take-up and school lunches in England*, School Food Trust, July 2012

children, while introducing a stay-on-site policy for younger ones. Dave makes proper food taste so good that children have flocked back to the canteen. From a low of 20%, take-up is now at 80%.

But Carshalton hasn't stopped there. It also offers a £1 breakfast for boys turning up early and a free curry in the late afternoon for those staying late. In the classroom, cooking lessons are compulsory for all children up to the age of 14. They even run a 'lads and dads' course where the boys teach their fathers to cook, to tackle the broader problems of malnourishment in the local area. They have chickens laying eggs and a garden club growing vegetables, all of which got used in the school kitchen.

This is all part of Simon's mission to nurture the whole child: alongside its amazing food culture, the school excels in sport and drama as well as more academic subjects. Last year, 100% of its children got five GCSEs at A* to C grades, 60% including English and maths – putting Carshalton in the top 5% of most improved state secondary schools.

Simon is in no doubt about the connection between food and academic achievement. "For many of my boys, this lunch will be their main meal of the day. Good food makes them happy, but also helps them work better," he told us. "And the culture and behaviour that begin in the canteen are responsible for an atmosphere that supports attainment across the whole school."

Schools like Carshalton do not come about by government decree. They are driven by great leaders, and by cooks who are given the right circumstances in which to flourish. This is not to say that government intervention is pointless. We believe that the Blair government was right to introduce compulsory food standards into schools. When things are really bad you may need legislation to get to adequate. But we now need to go from adequate to good, and good to great.

So how do we do this? All the research we have done points to two central insights.

First, that increasing take-up of school food is both the means and the end. The more children there are paying for school dinners, the more money goes into the system – and the better it becomes. The quality of the food goes up, and the price comes down, making it affordable to more and more families: a virtuous circle.

This may seem like an obvious point, but until quite recently school dinners were generally regarded as something that was done *to* schools by the local council, not something for which head teachers felt responsible. Changes in funding and legislation mean that this is no longer the case.

Creating a great food culture is not something that the state, councils, governors, parents or caterers can do without leadership from the head. This plan, therefore, is primarily aimed at giving head teachers the inspiration and structural support they need to lead the way.

“As a head teacher I always wanted to make sure that my children ate a good school lunch. Not only does a good quality lunch improve a pupil’s concentration in the afternoon, but the atmosphere in the canteen is critical to encouraging good behaviour.

More than that, lunch is the only time of day when the whole school – children and teachers – have a chance to come together. The atmosphere of the canteen sets a tone for the rest of the school and helps to establish the school’s culture.

Great schools do all things well. They not only nurture a child’s mind through outstanding teaching; they nurture the whole child through sport, art and food. Only with a combination of all of these things will we enable our children to reach their full potential.”

Sir Michael Wilshaw,
Chief Inspector of Schools

“You won’t get good grades in schools unless you are happy and fulfilled and unless the whole child is looked after. That means making sure that children are well fed; making sure they get a breakfast which can sustain them through the rigours of the morning; making sure that there is a proper lunch to look forward to; and making sure that as well as having choice, children are eating food that is healthy. The school lunch or dinner – the central meal of the day for many children – needs to be of the highest possible quality.”

Michael Gove,
Secretary of State for Education

In drawing up this plan, we resolved to follow certain principles. They were:

- **Positivity**

We were not going to spend our time criticising people. The sector had been criticised enough – everyone feels quite bashed about – and there was an evident hunger for a more positive approach. We decided to concentrate on finding out what already works well and helping other schools to adopt those practices.

- **Openness**

We wanted to communicate what we were doing as broadly as possible, to remove fear and suspicion and to encourage everyone to take part. We published on our website all the meetings we had and the papers we were reading. We held meetings all over the country, accepted many invitations to attend events and conferences, and talked to people on all sides of the debate, to understand the issues from every angle.

- **Consensus**

We were particularly anxious to work with those groups – the teachers, cooks, and councils – who would play the biggest role in bringing about change. In the past, reviews of school food were often seen as something imposed from on high. We were adamant that this would be a plan formulated and led by the people most closely involved.

- **Quick wins**

Whenever we saw something that could be done effectively and well straight away, we did it – rather than waiting for the plan to be published.

- **Data-driven**

We wanted to make sure that we got stuck into the quantitative and qualitative analysis. We studied what had gone before and conducted our own research. Mountains of data can be a slog to read (hence, we have consigned much of it to the appendices), but it was critical to getting the right answers.

We were determined from the outset that that this work should not become the next stack of paper on the doorstep of (excellent) academic research into school food. We set out to tackle it very differently from a traditional review, and we are happy that this is not a set of recommendations to the government, but a plan.

Instead of ideas, this plan proposes ‘actions’, some of which are already underway. There are specific people in charge of delivering each action. Richard Reed, co-founder of Innocent smoothies, and the branding expert Wally Olins have agreed to help devise a strategy for spreading the word to parents that school lunches are better than they used to be – and much healthier for their children than the alternatives. Jamie Oliver has agreed to help with this through his work in different media (TV, magazines and social media). The Secretary of State has already agreed to introduce compulsory cooking lessons into the national curriculum. And crucially, the government has agreed to provide funding where necessary to help schools improve their food provision and culture.

One of the things that has worked particularly well in the development of this plan is the way the expert panel – whose members are drawn from all the different sectors involved in school food – have come together to help us formulate it. We are delighted that the members of the expert panel have agreed to stay on to advise us for the first year of the plan’s implementation (we, Henry and John, will serve as the panel’s independent chairs for the first year).

We work in the food industry and have dedicated our professional lives to making it easy for everyone to eat good food. We know from experience how hard it is to produce popular, nutritious, low-cost meals. Much of the industry relies on cheap crowd-pleasers to make money: products with long shelf-lives, made from trans-fats, sugar and refined carbohydrates. These products have become ubiquitous across the western world, but they have no place in our schools (or hospitals).

This is not ‘food’ as our grandparents would recognise it. It is making the developed world sick – with diabetes, heart disease and cancer – and costing us billions of pounds in healthcare. In the 1970s, the US spent 16% of its GDP on food and 6% on healthcare. Today those numbers have pretty much reversed⁵. If we don’t act fast, Britain may end up in the same predicament.

We are determined to break this terrible cycle. And we believe that the battle begins in school.

⁵ Michael Pollan, *Cooked: a natural history of transformation: finding ourselves in the kitchen*, Allen Lane, 2013

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Giles Coren, on visiting Carshalton Boys Sports College, in The Times

It looks more or less like a school to me. Grange Hill rather than Hogwarts, but clean, quietish, well-appointed. There are hundreds of boys in school uniforms that fit some better than others, tie knots not too silly for the most part, by no means the sort of childhood obesity one sees on most London streets, and a gentle, irenic atmosphere prevailing.

We take a quick look at the chickens (12 Light Sussex by the looks of them), a geodome greenhouse project of some sort, some raised beds looking a bit winter-bare, hundreds of iPads (apparently a good thing), a cookery class in a very modern, Jamie-ish looking kitchen . . . and then lunch.

Blackboards show the meals, deals (“Main & 1 veg, dessert, drink, £1.90”) and specials, and you have from 1.05pm to 1.40pm to get in, eat and get out, though generally turnover of covers is seven minutes (a speed many Michelin- starred London joints would love to emulate), which is why so many can be served each day.

The standout dish for me is the salmon special with chilli and coriander: perfectly cooked, great texture, lively seasoning, with some pretty decent stir-fried vegetables. Totally wouldn’t disgrace a high street brasserie at something like £10.95, but available here for £1.65. The huge, scary head chef, Dave Holdsworth, tells me it costs him £1.60 to put on the plate, which is not going to be much different from that high street brasserie – it’s just a question of mark-ups.

There are delicious individual steak pies with terrific home-made pastry, good roast vegetables and quite excellent roast potatoes. . . . The boys drink canned things that are mostly juice; no Coke, Red Bull, Nurishment or Castrol GTX.

There’s a pasta bar, salads, and the puds, obviously, are historic. Great crumble (with pleasing saltiness in the topping, as it happens, to set off the sweetness of the fruit), lush jam roly poly, terrific custard, and lots of boring fruit for losers. . .

The great thing the headmaster, Simon Barber, has done here is to tackle his problem head-on. You can’t run any sort of food business on 20 per cent take-up. So he reduced his prices, hired a chef at a salary that wouldn’t disgrace a top West End restaurant, shortened his menu and accepted losses while he waited for take-up to improve. Crucially, he tackled the competition, the junk-food outlets up the road, cutting prices until they were no longer attractive options and driving them out of business, or at least out of the reckoning. And there is no pandering to childish whims – nobody is allowed to have only potatoes, it must be balanced platefuls.

It was easiest, of course, to change the attitudes of the youngest kids; the boys at the top of the school when he arrived, says Chef Dave, were beyond help. But now a proper attitude to food goes right through the school. And the civilised culture that begins in the canteen (boys clear up after each other, hold doors open, all that) now permeates the school.

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Our vision for school food in England

Flavourful, fresh food

Served by friendly, fulfilled cooks

In a financially-sound school kitchens.

This is what we want to see in schools across England:

- At least 70% of children eating school meals
- Those children eating tasty and nutritious food
- No child going hungry
- School cooks who are happy, confident, skilled and motivated
- Schools taking a ‘whole school approach’ to food, with creative collaborations between head teachers, school cooks, children, teachers, governors and parents
- Children who know how to feed themselves well, and who enjoy cooking and growing with their families, both at school and at home
- School kitchens that can stand on their own feet financially, enjoying a virtuous cycle of higher take-up, better quality and lower price.

Glossary

DfE – Department for Education

LA – Local authority

FSM – Free school meals

UFSM – Universal free school meals

SNAG – School nutrition action group (representing pupil's views), sometimes called SNAC i.e. school nutrition action club

DAT – Design and technology (within the national curriculum)

PHE – Public Health England

HWB – Health and Wellbeing Boards

School stages

Early Years Foundation Stage – children aged 3-5 in nursery or reception classes

Key stage 1 – children aged 5-7

Key stage 2 – children aged 7-11

Key stage 3 – children aged 11-14

Key stage 4 – children aged 14-16

Key stage 5 – children aged 16-18

Organisations

LACA – Lead Association for Catering in Education (formerly the Local Authority Caterers Association)

Children's Food Trust – charity offering advice and training to people involved in preparing food for children (formerly the School Food Trust)

FFLP – Food for Life Partnership – offering advice and training to schools and cooks to improve food and food culture

TES – Times Educational Supplement

OC&C – the consultancy that has kindly worked (at cost and paid for by charitable trusts) to help us analyse the data for this plan

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Chapter One: Why it matters

In which we see the damage that is being done to the nation's health, happiness and finances by bad diet, and lay out the benefits of introducing children to a good food culture as early as possible.

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Most people assume that the nation's diet is a matter for the Department of Health, not the Department for Education. It is, after all, the NHS that has to deal with the fall-out from Britain's addiction to junk food. The NHS now spends £5.1 billion a year treating illnesses caused by being overweight or obese, and a further £5.8 billion on other illnesses caused by bad diet⁶.

Together, this is 10% of its budget – equivalent to the cost of building 40 new hospitals every year. That bill is likely to get bigger. The obesity rate in the UK has risen from 6% of the population in 1980 to 27% today. Almost 10% of British children are already obese when they start primary school, and this figure rises to 19.2% by the time they leave at 11⁷.

Of course, obesity is not the only serious consequence of Britain's bad diet (indeed, the relentless focus on weight may be one reason why eating disorders are becoming more common among young children). Junk food can make you ill without necessarily making you fat. Many patients treated for metabolic syndrome (or pre-diabetes) are not overweight at all. And eating too few fruit and vegetables can make you ill whatever your weight⁸

Eating well reduces your chances of falling ill with cancer, heart disease, a stroke, or diabetes – whatever your weight. The Cabinet Office recently estimated that 70,000 premature deaths a year could be prevented if people made relatively modest changes to their eating habits⁹.

But this is not just about bodily well-being. A balanced and nutritious diet feeds the mind as well as the body. Many studies have shown that children who eat well perform better at school¹⁰. There is also evidence that practical cooking and gardening lessons help to develop children's scientific and environmental understanding. It is no accident that academically successful schools tend to have a good food culture.

At present, there are children in English schools who are too hungry to learn effectively. This is a limited problem, but a serious one. It covers both children arriving at school without having had breakfast, and those who are poor but not eligible for free school meals (FSM), and who therefore don't get enough to eat at lunch. Without a good lunch or breakfast, these children find it hard to concentrate and quickly fall behind in lessons.

And there are many hidden benefits to a good food culture. When children sit down to eat with friends and teachers in a civilised environment, it cements relationships, helps them to develop social skills and reinforces positive behaviour throughout the day. Lunch is an integral part of the school day, and should be one of the most enjoyable. We want children to leave school with an appreciation of good food, and the skills they need to feed themselves affordably and well. This will have a snowball effect: a generation of confident cooks will pass on those skills to their own children, enhancing England's slowly improving food culture.

⁶ Scarborough P, Bhatnagar P, Wickramasinghe K et al. 'The economic burden of ill health due to diet, physical inactivity, smoking, alcohol and obesity in the UK: an update to 2006–07 NHS costs', *Journal of Public Health*, May 2011.

⁷ Data from the National Child Measurement Programme 2011/12.

⁸ Murray et al, 'UK health performance: findings of the Global Burden of Disease Study 2010', *The Lancet*, March 2013.

⁹ The Strategy Unit, *Food Matters: Towards a Strategy for the 21st Century*, Cabinet Office, July 2008.

¹⁰ For example, Alaimo K, Olson CM, Frongillo EA Jr, 'Food Insufficiency and American School-Aged Children's Cognitive, Academic and Psychosocial Development', *Pediatrics* 2001;108(1):44-53. For a fuller list of relevant studies, see Appendix C: "Why it matters – evidence on health and achievement"

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Chapter Two: Teaching England to cook again

*In which we explain how learning to cook and grow
food can change lives, and rejoice at having convinced
the government to introduce compulsory cooking classes
for all children.*

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“Cooks get to put their hands on real stuff, not just keyboards and screens but fundamental things like plants and animals and fungi. They get to work with the primal elements, too, fire and water, earth and air, using them – mastering them! – to perform their tasty alchemies.”

*Michael Pollan,
Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation*

The decline of Britain's food culture has been long and painful. It goes back at least as far as the industrial revolution, when millions moved into the cities and found themselves cut off from the fresh produce, and culinary traditions, of the countryside. But today, in the age of mass-produced convenience food, we find ourselves in unprecedented difficulty. Several generations have now been raised in households where no one ever cooked. They have never seen their parents whisk an egg or peel a potato, let alone boil a carcass to make cheap stock. Cut off from this inheritance – the gift of self-sufficiency – they, in turn, don't know how to feed their own children, and cannot teach them to feed themselves.

There are signs of a revival of interest in cooking. The British are buying cookbooks in unprecedented numbers (Jamie Oliver is the UK's second best-selling author behind JK Rowling). Cookery programmes get blockbuster ratings, food is one of the most popular subjects on Twitter (along with television), and the rise of the food blogger suggests a growing cultural fascination with gastronomy.

Being interested in food, however, is not synonymous with cooking it. A recent survey, conducted by The Sunday Times as part of its better school meals campaign, found that fewer than 40% of British children can cook five savoury dishes by the time they leave school¹¹.

This is a self-perpetuating problem – and one that becomes more acute with poverty¹². The tighter your budget, the more skilful you need to be in the kitchen. Most convenience food is extremely cheap to produce (being largely made of fat, sugar and dough). Even with a hefty mark-up, it can be sold at prices that the poorest families can afford.

Cooking a meal from scratch for the same price isn't simple. If you don't know where to find the cheapest ingredients, and how to transform them into something wholesome and tasty, it can feel impossibly daunting. Living off frozen ready-meals and fast food may actually seem cheaper, since the costs are easier to calculate.

The personal and social costs, however, are punishing. Rising obesity in children is causing significant health concerns – increased asthma and sleep apnoea, as well as a dramatic increase in rates of hypertension and Type 2 diabetes. Children who are overweight are more likely to become obese in adult life¹³, and that has an impact on us all.

No child wants to be fat or ill. No parent wants to make them so. In order to break this cycle, we need to teach the next generation how to cook. In a 2012 survey of 12,000 families, 98% of parents thought “children should be taught to cook at school”¹⁴.

This isn't exactly a new idea. The 1870 Education Act called for all girls to learn ‘domestic skills’, including bakery and needlework. Alas, the notion that cookery was a ‘girls’ subject’ (soft and un-academic, fitting them only for a life of domestic

¹¹ Poll conducted by YouGov on behalf of the Sunday Times, May 2013.

¹² A 1992 study in America found that poor women who regularly cooked from scratch had a healthier diet than rich women who did not. Haines, P. S. et al., “Eating Patterns and Energy and Nutrient Intakes of US Women,” *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*.

¹³ For more on this topic, see Public Health England's information on Childhood Obesity: http://www.noo.org.uk/NOO_about_obesity/obesity_and_health/health_risk_child.

¹⁴ Arnold Fewell, *The LACA/ParentPay Market Research Report on School Meals and Daily Life Issues 2012*, November 2012

servitude) proved hard to shake off, and cookery has often been given second-class status in schools – if not abandoned completely.

In 1989, when Kenneth Baker introduced the first national curriculum, cooking was shoe-horned somewhat awkwardly into the design and technology (DAT) curriculum. There it has remained ever since.

Cooking is such a different discipline from most of the other DAT subjects that it is difficult to devise a curriculum that adequately covers all the bases. As a result, the wording has tended to be deliberately vague, and often confusing.

For example, in the current DAT curriculum (drafted in 2007), children at key stage 2 are expected to ‘design and make assignments using a range of materials, including electrical and mechanical components, food, mouldable materials, stiff and flexible sheet materials, and textiles’.

This is not a recognisable description of cooking. There is no mention of practical kitchen skills or healthy eating. If schools follow the curriculum to the letter, children should, by the age of 14, be able to ‘work safely’, ‘accurately’ and ‘with precision’ with food to make ‘high quality, functional products’. But they won’t necessarily be able to cook. There are some schools that go well beyond the letter of the curriculum: getting children to grow their own vegetables and then cook them, for example, or using food and growing to illuminate other subjects, such as science or geography.

But this is not the norm. At the first three ‘food technology’ classes we attended, all the children were making cupcakes. At the fourth, they were making ‘healthy’ apple muffins. Cakes are cheap and crowd-pleasing, and lovely in moderation. But man cannot live on apple muffins alone. Clearly, the rules have to change.

We were fortunate to be putting together this plan at the same time as the government was drafting a new curriculum. This gave us a golden opportunity to redraw the guidelines. We wanted a curriculum that would give children the practical skills and knowledge they need to feed themselves well for life. And we wanted them to learn about where food comes from and what it can do for their bodies, thereby developing a lasting love of, and interest in, *good* food.

At the same time, we had to consider the requirements of other design and technology subjects. Clearly these guidelines must not get in the way of other parts of the curriculum aimed at inspiring a generation of inventors. So we worked with the Design and Technology Association to hammer out a set of words that everyone liked (see box). We are delighted that the government has accepted our wording, and agreed to make cooking a compulsory part of the national curriculum up to the age of 14. This is a huge step forward. The new curriculum will, we believe, transform the way cooking is taught in this country, handing back to our children the kitchen skills that should be their birthright. Learning how to cook is only half the battle, though. You also need to learn how to eat. Developing a sophisticated palate, choosing food that nurtures your body, sitting at a table enjoying the company of others – these are all habits that are acquired through practise.

Which leads us to the next part of our plan: getting more children eating better food in schools.

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Cooking in the curriculum:

extracts from the revised programmes of study
for design and technology

Aims [of the full design and technology curriculum]

The national curriculum for design and technology aims to ensure that all pupils:

- develop the creative, technical and practical expertise needed to perform everyday tasks confidently and to participate successfully in an increasingly technological world

- build and apply a repertoire of knowledge, understanding and skills in order to design and make high quality prototypes and products for a wide range of users
- critique, evaluate and test their ideas and products and the work of others
- understand and apply the principles of nutrition and learn how to cook.

Cooking and nutrition

As part of their work with food, pupils should be taught how to cook and apply the principles of nutrition and healthy eating. Instilling a love of cooking in pupils will also open a door to one of the great expressions of human creativity. Learning how to cook is a crucial life skill that enables pupils to feed themselves and others affordably and well, now and in later life.

Pupils should be taught to:

Key stage 1

- use the basic principles of a healthy and varied diet to prepare dishes
- understand where food comes from.

Key stage 2

- understand and apply the principles of a healthy and varied diet
- prepare and cook a variety of predominantly savoury dishes using a range of cooking techniques
- understand seasonality, and know where and how a variety of ingredients are grown, reared, caught and processed.

Key stage 3

- understand and apply the principles of nutrition and health
- cook a repertoire of predominantly savoury dishes so that they are able to feed themselves and others a healthy and varied diet
- become competent in a range of cooking techniques, such as selecting and preparing ingredients; using utensils and electrical equipment; applying heat in different ways; using awareness of taste, texture and smell to decide how to season dishes and combine ingredients; adapting and using their own recipes
- understand the source, seasonality and characteristics of a broad range of ingredients.

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ACTION:

Put cooking in the curriculum:

Make cooking and food an ‘entitlement’ (i.e. mandatory) in key stages 1 to 3

For the first time ever, practical cookery is to be made compulsory in the national curriculum for children up to year 9. The requirement for cookery lessons will come into effect in 2014.

The key now is to make sure the implementation is good. Obviously, teachers need the resources to teach the subject well. That means providing equipment and help with lesson planning. There are only 159 secondary schools (less than 5%) in England that don't already have a teaching kitchen¹⁵. We have asked those schools to contact us so that we can help them put one in place.

By contrast, only 25% of primary schools have a teaching kitchen. That doesn't mean they can't teach cooking: on the contrary, many already do, using electric hotplates and other temporary equipment, or creating foodstuffs (such as bread) that can be prepared in the classroom and then finished off at home. We have been careful to word the curriculum in a way that allows for this sort of lesson.

To make sure teachers get the help they need with planning lessons and brushing up their own cooking skills, we have enlisted the help of the Times Educational Supplement (TES). Its website – the UK's most accessed resource for teachers – will have a section dedicated to cooking lessons. It will showcase brilliant lesson plans and wider curricula from different schools, and it will list resources which schools can use to support their teaching efforts – such as the Children's Food Trust, Chefs Adopt a School programme and the Jamie Oliver Foundation, which are developing guidance for cookery lessons.

The site will also give advice on issues such as class size (most of the best schools teach cooking in groups of 18 or fewer), lesson timing (it may be necessary to extend cooking lessons to slightly over an hour), and funding (we have visited a number of schools in poorer areas where the school provides the ingredients free of charge and others where the school canteen buys the ingredients in bulk and then charges parents for them, thus considerably reducing the cost of lessons).

Responsibility for curriculum: Department for Education

Responsibility for TES support: Henry and John

¹⁵ Louise Davies, *No Food Teaching at Our School: survey of all secondary schools in England*, Design and Technology Association, 2008

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Chapter Three: Increasing take-up of school food: the means *and* the end

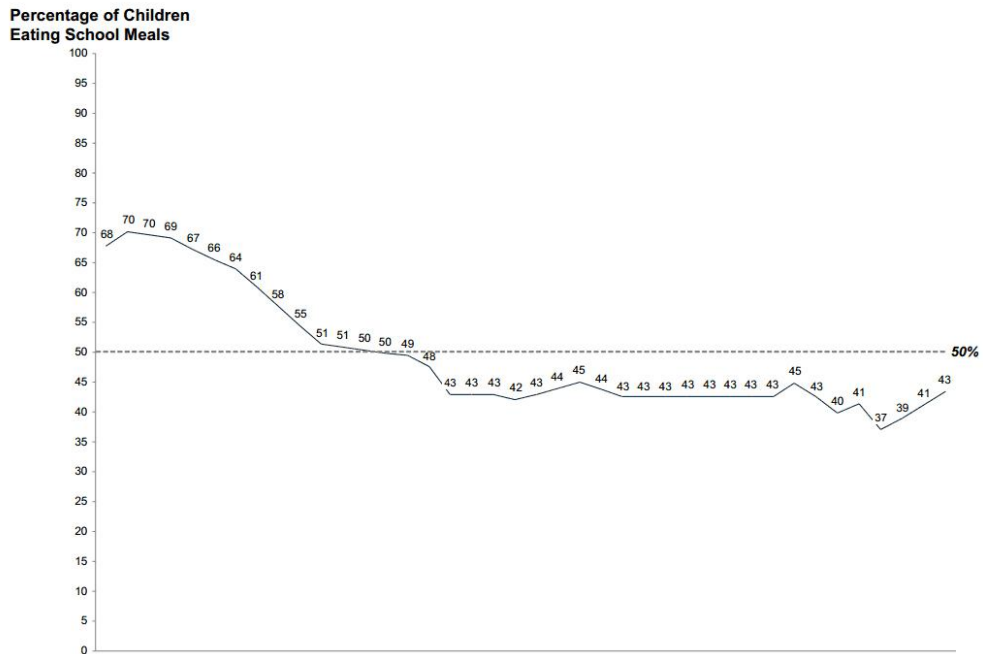
In which we learn why so many children have swapped school dinners for packed lunches, and how this has left some school canteens unable to break even; we consider the Herculean difficulty of making a nutritionally-balanced packed lunch; and we demonstrate the win-win logic of increasing take-up.

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The first real “Eureka!” moment in the course of our research came during a meeting with Michael Nelson, then Director of Research and Nutrition at the Children’s Food Trust.

As he was talking us through what had happened to school meals over the years, Michael opened up the following graph on his laptop:

Figure 1: Percentage of children eating school meals, 1973-2012¹⁶

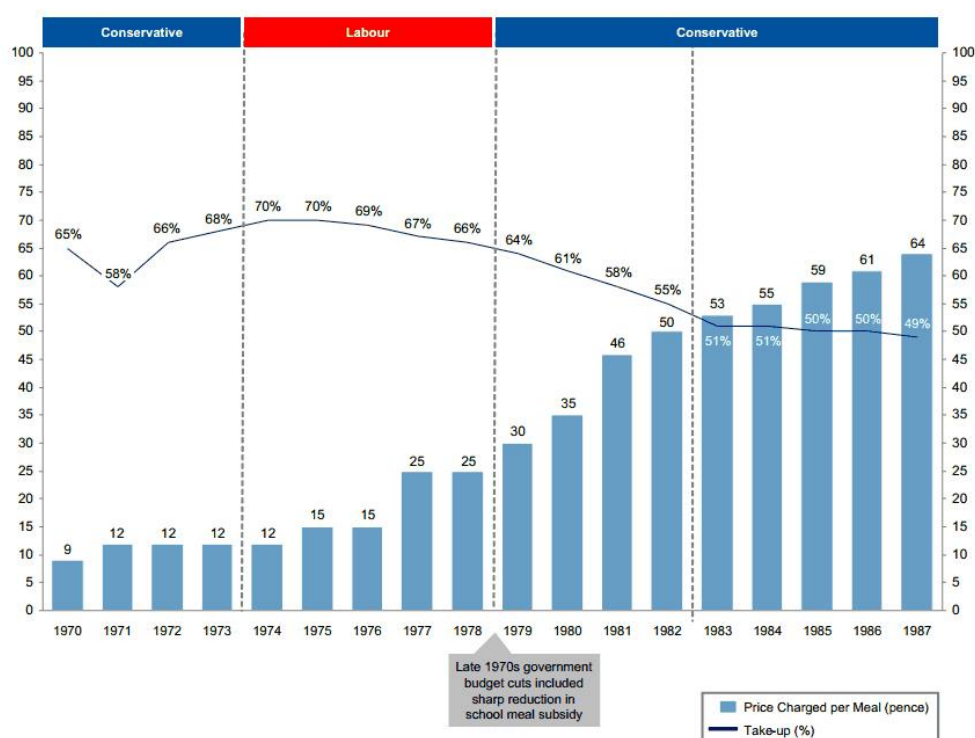


It shows a line tracing the percentage of children eating school meals in England over the past four decades. Take-up started at 70% in the early seventies and then tumbled away like a cliff collapsing into the sea, sinking below 50% – the point at which school dinners, on average, become economically unviable – in the mid-eighties. For a long time it languished around 40%, and has only recently begun to bob back up.

The reasons for this precipitous decline in popularity are complex. The price of school meals increased dramatically, first because of the rampant inflation of the mid-seventies, and then because of the removal in 1980 of national pricing limits for school meals. Many families switched to packed lunches as a way of saving money.

¹⁶ Average for primary and secondary schools. Based on data from Michael Nelson, Children’s Food Trust, Berger, *The School Meals Service: from its beginnings to the present day*, Northcote, 1989 and analysis by OC&C.

Figure 2: Price and take-up trend, 1970-1987¹⁷



Packed lunches were also increasingly easy to prepare, thanks to the advent of supermarket shopping and a new generation of mass-produced, heavily-marketed convenience foods. Even the most frazzled parent could assemble a quick (and popular) packed lunch of pre-sliced bread, pre-sliced ham, cheesy triangles and a chocolate bar. Meanwhile, high street fast food outlets – along with expertly branded crisps and snacks – raced ahead of school food in terms of excitement and appeal.

Fewer children eating school dinners meant less money coming into the system. A vicious circle was soon established.

As the food that was available more broadly in society became increasingly industrialised, this was reflected in schools. Many councils started buying in services from industrial food manufacturers and even fast food operators. School cooks – once skilled professionals – were reduced to opening packets of pre-cooked food and throwing it into the deep-fat fryer. Thus began the dark days of the Turkey Twizzler.

The final blow – a painful but necessary one – came in 2005, when Channel 4 broadcast *Jamie's School Dinners*. By showing the nation what had become of school dinners, Jamie Oliver created a much-needed dose of public outrage – and a momentum for change which continues to this day. But in the short-term, the programme turned a lot of stomachs. Many parents thought that their children would be better off with a packed lunch, and take-up fell briefly to an all-time low of 37%.

¹⁷ Average for primary and secondary schools. Based on data from Bank of England; ONS; Berger, *The School Meals Service: from its beginnings to the present day*, Northcote, 1989

Since that time, thanks to the hard work of many people, the quality of food has improved enormously and take-up has risen to an average of 43%¹⁸.

But it is clear that, in many schools, the food service is still not attractive enough to children and parents. Only one in three families who are not eligible for free school meals (FSM) choose to pay for them (the chart below shows the rates of take-up, first for FSM children and then for children who have to pay, for a range of schools surveyed by the Children’s Food Trust).

Figure 3: Take-up by school: percentage of children eating school food¹⁹



How take-up varies by local authority

Once, all school food was provided by local councils. These days, schools have much greater freedom to decide who should do their catering, with many choosing to hire private companies or bring the service in-house. Nevertheless, local authorities remain big-hitters in the world of school food. They can help set the tone by encouraging schools to prioritise food, and they still provide 56% of all school meals and manage contracts for a further 18% of school meals²⁰.

There are wide variations in the take-up levels within different local authorities. In the best-performing councils, take-up peaks at over 90% for primaries and over 70% for secondaries.

¹⁸ 54% of children in primary schools take packed lunch. 33% of pupils in secondary schools take packed lunches, 11% eat off-site and 17% eat nothing at school at all. Source: Michael Nelson, Jo Nicholas, Katy Riley, Lesley Wood, *Seventh Annual survey of take-up and school lunches in England*, School Food Trust, July 2012.

¹⁹ Source: Children’s Food Trust.

²⁰ See the Appendix slide on the typical flows of money through the school food system and the volume of meals provided by different means.

In the worst-performing councils, it hovers around 20% for both primary and secondary schools²¹.

To help us understand what the low- and high-achievers might have in common, we divided local authorities into four broad categories. For our own entertainment, we gave them names inspired by the Tour de France²².

The Break-aways

These are the leaders of the pack – the top 10% of local authorities, with take-up averaging more than 60%. They are all in the north of England or inner London. They include Newham, Durham and Islington, all of which have run universal free school meal pilot schemes (see Chapter Eleven); and others that have made heroic efforts to increase take-up without making the meals free (Bolton, Wandsworth, Tower Hamlets).

The Peloton

This constitutes the bulk of the pack: the 40% of local authorities that already have take-up of 40-60% and are growing it steadily. They are mostly in the North, some in the Midlands, with a high proportion of local authority provision.

The Come-back kids

The schools in these areas are toiling hard to boost take-up from a low starting point: typically between 25-45%. Their numbers are improving, albeit gradually. They represent 25% of local authorities and are mostly in the South East (especially big shire counties such as Kent, Surrey, Hampshire and Sussex) and South West (Plymouth, Torbay, Dorset, Swindon, Somerset). They tend to have a high level of contract-caterer provision.

The Stragglers

These are the local authorities where school food take-up is low and still falling. They represent around 15% of the total. They do not share any easily defined common characteristics.

In school kitchens – as in commercial restaurants – economies of scale really matter. The two biggest costs that go into any meal are the ingredients and the staff-hours. Of these, labour costs are the most affected by scale. A chef can just as easily make a chicken curry for ten people as for one. The more customers she is cooking for, the lower the relative cost of her wages.

A restaurant that is only 43% full will go bust because of these fixed costs. And the same is true of school canteens. Unless they can get enough children paying to eat their food – and therefore covering the cost of preparing it – they will not break even.

It is very hard to get a precise national picture, but we estimate that significantly more than half of all schools are currently in that predicament²³. Most loss-

²¹See the two Appendix slides showing the wide variation in take-up rates achieved across a sample of local authorities, as reported in the School Food Trust's 2012 survey.

²²See the Appendix slide showing the distribution of local authorities according to the latest (2011-12) take-up rates achieved in their primary schools and the change in take-up from three years previously.

²³ 21% of local authorities reported making a loss on school food, and 37% reported breaking even (School Food Trust Annual Survey, 2011). Even within a local authority which is breaking even, up to 50% of the schools may be loss-making.

making school canteens are kept afloat with subsidies, either from the council or from the school's own budget. This costs the taxpayer £140 million per year²⁴, on top of the £428 million²⁵ that the government already spends on free school meals.

But the alternatives are even worse. Some schools have resorted to charging exorbitant prices for their meals (a short-term solution, since it inevitably drives away even more children); others have closed down their food services altogether.

As a rule of thumb, in individual schools lunch provision can be made financially sustainable at around 100 meals per day²⁶. On a national scale, that averages out at a take-up of 50%. In other words, school meals in this country have not broken even for 25 years. Given these daunting numbers, is school food really worth fighting for? Why bother, Canute-like, to rail against the oncoming tide? Why not simply shut down the school meals service altogether and force all parents to make packed lunches, as a former teacher argued recently in the *Independent*²⁷. That question can be answered with science.

The vast majority of packed lunches are simply not nutritious enough. That is not a matter of opinion, but of empirical fact. Research published in 2010 by Dr Charlotte Evans of Leeds University revealed that only 1% of packed lunches meet the overall nutritional standards that currently apply to school food (see chart below). A random sample of 1,000 packed lunches found that 85% contained sandwiches, while two thirds contained sweets, sugary drinks and savoury snacks such as crisps. Only one in five contained the recommended proportion of vegetables.

Figure 4: Content of example packed lunches²⁸

²⁴ Based on a sample of 11,500 schools (School Food Trust Annual Survey, 2011). The cost of producing meals (£2.30 for primary, £2.41 for secondary) exceeded the price charged (£1.97 and £2.03 respectively). Excluding meals funded by the FSM subsidy, there are 2.2 million meals served per day over 190 school days. Allowing for a 35p deficit per meal (the weighted average for primary and secondary), this creates an annual subsidy of about £140 million.

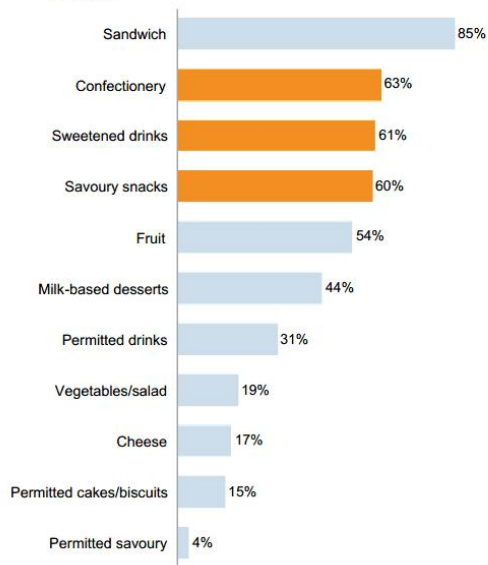
²⁵ See the Appendix slide on the sources of funding for school food. Approximately 970,000 free school meals are served each day and, based on 190 school days per year and an average cost of £2.35 (as indicated by SFT data), that implies c.£428 million FSM cost each year.

²⁶ See Figure 11 in chapter nine on the range of profitability achieved across a set of primary schools in an unnamed local authority.

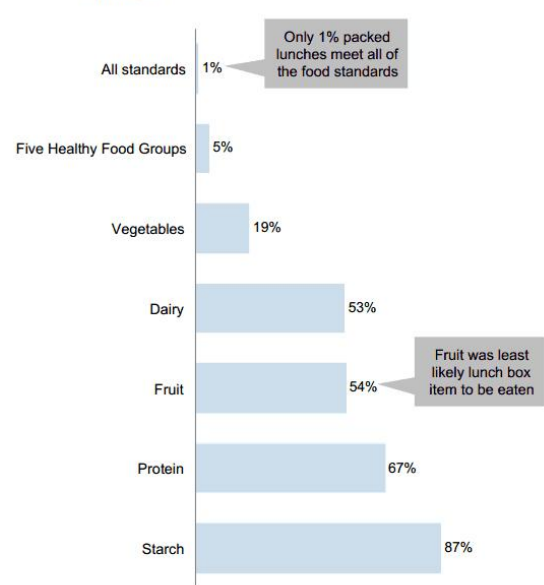
²⁷ <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/do-we-still-need-school-dinners-8577039.html>

²⁸ Evans C, Greenwood D, Thomas J, Cade J, "A cross-sectional survey of children's packed lunches in the UK: food and nutrient based results", *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 2010

Percentage of Packed Lunches Containing Different Foods (Pupils Aged 8&9)
N=1,294



Percentage Of Lunch Boxes Meeting Food Standards
%, N=1,294



This is not a problem of lackadaisical parenting. Making a good, nutritionally-balanced packed lunch, day after day, is hard. On its excellent website, the Children’s Food Trust publishes a menu plan for three weeks’ worth of nutritionally-sound packed lunches. Were you to follow it, you would need to prepare all these dishes from scratch:

- Tuna mayonnaise sandwich
- Rice salad with turkey
- Meatballs and mixed salad in a wholemeal pitta
- Pasta salad with chicken and vegetables
- Carrot and pumpkin seed salad
- Sliced beef and mixed salad in a roll
- Couscous salad with diced lamb and apricots
- Cheddar and coleslaw in a wholemeal pitta
- Home-made smoked mackerel spread in a sandwich
- Potato and egg salad
- Pork sausage in a bread roll
- Spanish omelette
- Beef and beetroot sandwich
- Pasta salad with pork and peas
- Chilli chicken and red kidney bean tortilla wrap
- Carrot and apricot cake
- Seeded flapjack
- Chocolate bran flake slice
- Crème caramel
- Fresh fruit salad (kiwi, orange and grapes)

The mere thought of this amount of cooking – on top of making breakfast and dinner for the family – would make anyone’s eyes water, but for a parent working full time it would be a Herculean task.

Some parents do manage it – and all credit to them. We have seen children magic hot three-course dinners out of their lunch boxes, to the envy of their friends. But they are definitely the exception to the rule.

The same is true of children buying their food outside school. While there might be a few conscientious children who seek out a wholesome meal on the high street, the vast majority of children who go off site for lunch spend their money on junk food, canned drinks, crisps and sweets.²⁹

With very few exceptions, even a ‘mediocre’ school meal is better for you than the alternatives. And this is especially true now that the overall quality of school meals has improved significantly.

Ashley Adamson, Professor of Public Health Nutrition at Newcastle University, has been studying the impact of the changes in food policy that were brought about by Jamie Oliver’s programmes. She and her team began their researches by standing in school dining halls making notes of what children actually ate (as opposed to what they put on their plates). They then went back to the lab and analysed its nutritional value.

What they found is that, by almost every nutritional measure, the quality of what our children are eating in schools has improved. Indeed, this improvement has been so dramatic that it is now being studied by other countries as an example of how to transform children’s diets.³⁰

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The reformation of school food, then, is already underway. Wonderful things are being done to ensure that children get the food they deserve. What’s needed now is consolidation, to ensure that these improvements spread to all schools.

Increasing take-up, as we have said, is both the means and the end: the means, because it would make the service economically viable; the end, because eating a school dinner is so much better than the alternatives.

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Increasing take-up: a virtuous circle

In business terms, the school food system is making a hefty loss. Even leaving out the central government funding for free school meals, schools and councils collectively spend another £140 million or so every year to bridge the gap between the cost of producing school food and the money taken at the till. School food isn’t the same as a commercial business of course, and most of the schools and councils that subsidise it would say it is an investment they are happy or even proud to

²⁹ Research by Professor Jack Winkler and Sarah Sinclair at London Metropolitan University found that pupils allowed off the school site at lunchtime are far more likely to eat junk food – high in fat and sugar – from ‘fringe’ shops near their school. Sarah Sinclair, J T Winkler, *The School Fringe, what pupils buy and eat from shops surrounding secondary schools*, Nutrition Policy Unit, London Metropolitan University, July 2008.

³⁰ Adamson A, White M and Stead M, *The process and impact of change in school food policy on food and nutrient intake both in and outside of school*, Department of Health: Public Health Research Consortium, 2011.

make. In today's economic climate, however, schools and councils are having to count the pennies more carefully, and justifying that investment will only get harder. This is another reason why increasing take-up is such an important part of the School Food Plan.

The good news is that take-up is already on the rise. If we can accelerate this trend, the economics of the whole system will improve rapidly. The table below shows the estimated financial impact of increasing take-up, without assuming any change in the type of food served or the way the system is managed:

Average take-up (%)	Meals served per day (m)	Average cost per meal (pence)	(Investment) / Surplus (£m)
40%	3.0	235	(142)
50%	3.7	214	(26)
60%	4.5	198	100
70%	5.2	187	233

What this tells us is that school food would break even at just over 50% take-up (compared to today's 43% average). That's roughly 3.8 million meals a day, meaning the average school would need to serve 20% more meals than it does now. That would be a big increase, but not an impossible one. In most schools there are already days when the canteen gets much busier, so staff know what it's like to prepare the extra ingredients, plate the extra meals, and find space for the extra children in the dining hall.

Things would get really exciting if take-up reached 60% or 70%. Exceeding the break-even number would mean generating a surplus – and at 70% take-up that could be more than £200 million per year. That money could be used in many different ways to reinforce the food culture of the school. It could help finance breakfast clubs, or buy even better ingredients, or bring down the price of school meals so that even more children can enjoy them. It could be used to fund an extension to free school meals, or to support cooking and growing clubs. In short, high take-up would create a virtuous circle, enabling schools to do a range of things that their present financial predicament just won't allow them to do.

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The biggest potential source of funding for school food is the roughly £1 billion³¹ a year that parents currently spend on packed lunches. Imagine if a philanthropic billionaire wanted to make an endowment that would provide the school food service with £1 billion a year. He or she would have to create a £30 billion

³¹ The estimated c.£1bn amount spent each year on lunches that are not school food is calculated by taking the 1.4 billion total 'lunch occasions' annually in state schools (excl. special schools), taking away the number of school lunches, resulting in 798k lunch occasions where children eat a packed lunch or buy from a take-away/chicken shop or 'corner shop'. We then use an average spend of £1.25 for packed lunches or take-away to give the annual total of £1 billion.

investment fund – a figure that dwarfs the total of £650 million spent by the Blair government, over six years, on improving school food.

If we could persuade parents to spend their £1 billion on school lunches instead of packed lunches, we would have no need of that philanthropist. There would be more than enough money to ensure first-class food services in every school in England.

There is, however, a snag. When parents were asked by the Children’s Food Trust in 2012 why they chose packed lunches over school lunches, the most common answer was that school lunches were too expensive. The average school dinner costs about £2.00, whereas a packed lunch – albeit a pretty poor one – can be made for less than 50p³². Given that most families’ disposable income is going down every year, is it realistic to expect them to switch to school meals?

The answer is to be found at the many excellent schools that have already made it happen.

* * *

ACTION: Improve the image of school food – *Use our ‘brand’ team to spread the good news about school food.*

We want parents to realise that school lunches are miles better than they used to be – and much healthier for their children than the alternatives. Richard Reed, co-founder of Innocent smoothies, and the branding expert Wally Olins have agreed to help devise a strategy for spreading the word. We have already run positive campaigns in The Sun and The Sunday Times, and will continue to use newspaper, television and social media to:

- Share success stories
- Share the evidence on how good school food improves health and attainment
- Encourage children to think up ideas for improving their school lunches (for example, through newspaper and online competitions, children’s TV programmes etc)
- Get parents into schools to try the food.

Jamie Oliver has agreed to help share good news through his work in different media (TV, magazines and social media).

Responsibility: Henry and John

³² 46p, in fact. See the Appendix slide giving achievable prices for three packed lunches, from a very basic version at 46p to one with more expensive ingredients costing over £1 (which assumes no food wasted and no cost for the labour involved in buying or preparing packed lunches). The Children’s Food Trust carried out a survey of 1,823 packed lunches in 2011/12 and their findings can be found here: <http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/research/schoolfoodstandardsresearch/secondarieschoolfoodsurvey/secondary-school-meals-versus-packed-lunches-2011>.

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The Economics of School Food

Let us imagine an absolutely typical primary school: one that corresponds to all the national averages. We'll call it St Typical's.

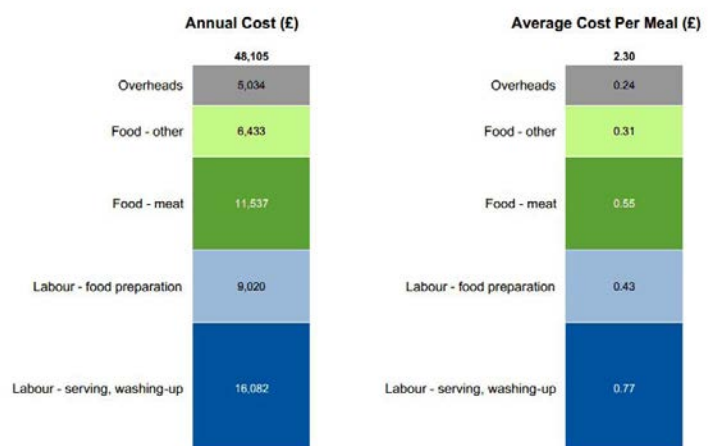
There are 240 children at St Typical's, of whom 110 eat a school lunch on each of the 190 school days a year. The price of each school meal is £1.97 – paid either by parents or (in the case of FSM-eligible families) the government. That makes a total turnover of £41,300 a year.

The head teacher, Mrs Hypothetical, has to balance the books for the lunch service. These are her outgoings:

- £25,100 a year on wages (three cooks, each working 4.5 hours per day, at £8 per hour for the two assistants and £11 per hour for the head cook)
- £17,970 a year on ingredients (or 86p per meal)
- £5,030 a year on other overheads (cutlery, crockery, equipment, HR and other support).

That adds up to a total of £48,100. In order to cover her costs, Mrs Hypothetical would have to charge £2.30 per meal. But raising prices would almost certainly mean a decline in take-up. Yet as it stands, the school is making a £6,800 annual loss on the food it provides.

Figure 5: Total annual cost and average cost per meal for an average primary school



What can Mrs Hypothetical do to reduce the cost of each meal enough to break even, and perhaps even create a surplus?

Take-up

The first priority must be to increase take-up. Because labour (and overheads) do not increase in line with the number of meals served, the economies of scale quickly kick in.

If take-up at St Typical's increased from 110 meals per day to 150, labour costs would fall by 18p per meal (from £1.20 to £1.02). Overheads would also go down, by another 6p per meal.

There are many different things Mrs Hypothetical can do to raise take-up (see our checklist for head teachers). She will need to plan carefully to keep the kitchen and dining hall working smoothly with a higher turnover of meals. She might have to do some fundraising, or dip into the school budget, to pay upfront costs such as redecorating the dining hall or buying new kitchen equipment. But the financial benefit of adding just 40 more meals to the total is significant: a saving of 24p per meal – almost enough to break even.

Labour efficiency

At a school like St Typical's, there are almost always opportunities to improve the efficiency of the kitchen team. School chefs often feel that they are working at full capacity, when in fact they are working within a system that slows them down. With good training, a well-planned kitchen routine, menus designed to be quick and easy to produce, and a motivated team, it is surprising how much more can be done.

The Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) has conducted a very detailed survey of school kitchens (see Chapter Seven). This shows that, while the average

staff member produces around 8.5 meals per hour, the best produce more than 13 meals per hour.

Even saving one hour of labour per day is equivalent to £1,800 over a year. But we're not suggesting that dedicated, talented staff should have their hours cut. On the contrary: as take-up increases, school kitchens will need all hands on deck.

As more of the children at St Typical's start eating a school lunch, the kitchen staff will either have to work longer hours to produce the extra meals, or improve their efficiency. If they can increase productivity to 11 meals per staff member per hour (a rate that is already common in the more efficient primary school kitchens), they will save the school a further 15p per meal.

The cost of ingredients

Being an enlightened head teacher, Mrs Hypothetical does not want to see any reduction in the quality of her school food. So she needs to find ways of cutting costs without compromising on taste or nutrition. She can do this through both menu design (*what she buys*) and purchasing techniques (*how she buys*).

Meat and fish are the most expensive elements of any menu. Good chefs know to use expensive cuts sparingly, and to make the most of cheap (but delicious) cuts.

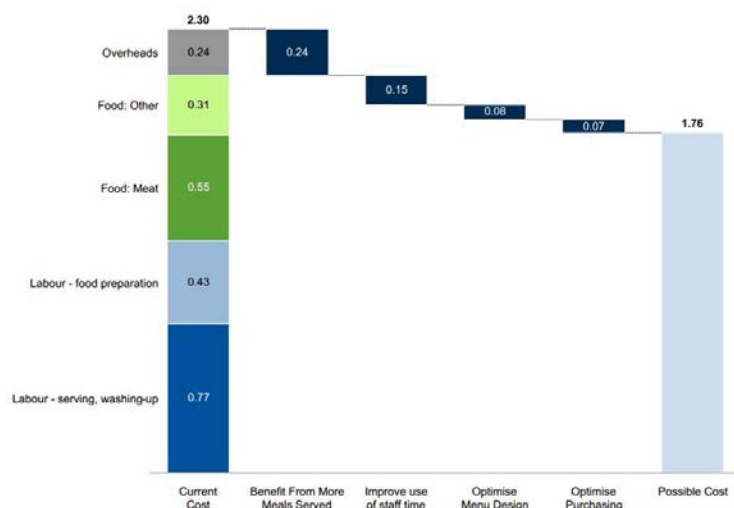
We have spoken to several wholesalers who specialise in school food, to find out some of the tricks of thrifty purchasing. These include:

- Signing contracts for all your ingredients in one go, rather than negotiating separate contracts. The bigger your order, the more bargaining power you have.
- Planning ahead carefully. It is much more expensive to buy ingredients that aren't included in your contract.
- Being careful about what delivery charges might be buried in the terms and conditions of a contract.
- Where possible, switching from branded to unbranded products.
- Ordering online – it usually works out cheaper than the paper-based admin still prevalent in many schools.
- Co-operating with other schools to buy in bulk. Again, the bigger the scale the better the prices.

Clever menu-planning and purchasing could save St Typical's 15p per meal – bringing the average cost of ingredients down to 71p per meal.

Figure 6: Impact of efficiency on meal price for an average primary school³³

³³ Estimated £ per meal, based on OC&C interviews and analysis.



By making all these changes, Mrs Hypothetical can bring her average cost per meal down to £1.76. If she continues to charge £1.97 per meal, that gives her a profit of £4,000 per year.

Some schools use their surplus to lower the price of their meals, thereby encouraging more children to switch to school food. If St Typical's followed the typical trend (and of course it would), bringing the price down to £1.80 per meal would lift overall take-up to 70%. That would push down the cost per meal even further, creating a real virtuous circle.

Starting that virtuous circle is a challenge. It takes willpower, imagination and persistence to win children over to school food and trim costs without compromising on the food.

One of the most effective tactics we have seen – counter-intuitive though it seems – is for schools that are making a loss on their lunches to cut their prices. Offering cheaper meals, even for a short period of time, increases take-up straightaway, gets children back into the habit of eating school food and gives the whole system a boost, which soon translates into better economics.

St Typical's is an average school. Smaller schools face somewhat different challenges. In Chapter Nine, we will discuss their problems (and some solutions) in more detail.

Likewise, secondary schools tend to have slightly different economics. They benefit from larger pupil numbers but take-up is generally lower than at primary schools and many pupils do not buy a full meal. They also have higher costs per meal – partly because older children need more food, and partly because secondary schools tend to offer more choice, in an effort to lure in children who might otherwise buy their lunch off-site.

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Chapter Four: What the schools that are doing it right have in common

In which we learn why so many children have swapped school dinners for packed lunches, and how this has left some school canteens unable to break even; we consider the Herculean difficulty of making a nutritionally-balanced packed lunch; and we demonstrate the win-win logic of increasing take-up.

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Lunches at Woodham Academy – a 760-strong secondary school in County Durham – used to be a sorry affair. The food (provided by a private caterer) wasn't cooked, so much as reconstituted. Everything was reheated from frozen, with barely a fresh vegetable in sight. "It wasn't about care for the students, it was about profit," remembers head teacher Christine Forsyth.

Although 36% of the children were eligible for free school meals, take-up never got above 40%. In other words, hardly any of those children who had to pay chose to eat a school lunch.

Christine decided to take the catering 'in house'. She hired Linda Vipond, a catering manager with 20 years of experience working in restaurants, as well as in catering colleges. Linda believes that school children should be given the same respect as any other customers. What they want matters.

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Who is the customer?

This is a question we keep hearing from the people who cook food for schools. Whom should they be aiming to please? The child, the parents, the teachers, the business managers, or the government? The answer must surely be the child.

But that means considering his or her long-term, as well as short-term, needs. On a daily basis, it is our job to feed the hungry child who has just powered her way through double maths and needs something to revive her: something tasty and nourishing that will provide enough energy to see her through the rest of the day.

But we also want to help today's children grow into healthy adults, with good eating habits that will sustain them for the rest of their lives.

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The first thing Linda did was design healthy menus that the children would actually eat. She asked for their suggestions, and acted on them. Vegetarian versions of classics such as cottage pie and toad-in-the-hole were requested and have proved a big hit. Nearly everything is freshly made: even the pasta for the cannelloni. Every day the kitchen serves between six and eight vegetable dishes, such as roast parsnips, braised red cabbage, leeks in cheese sauce and stir-fried veg.

The school's two dining halls have been redecorated, at a cost of around £5,000 each, to make them brighter and more funky. The colourful walls are now decorated with 'street art' created by the students. Flat-screen TVs show music videos. "Some schools say you can only have the news on the TV," says Linda. "But they've been sitting in their classes all morning long and this is their time to chill."

Linda's menu always includes a 'meal deal' – a cooked main course and a pudding – for £1.95: a much better bargain than the average high street sandwich. Children can choose what they eat (for example, there are 'grab-and-go' items for those who want to head off quickly) and most pay with a top-up card to keep the system as cashless as possible.

Linda and her staff see it as their job not just to feed the children, but to educate them about food. They get students to help them in the kitchen, wearing chefs' whites to serve the food. They also provide cookery lessons for disadvantaged families, and run a healthy breakfast club.

Above all, they listen carefully to the students, taking a personal interest in their eating habits. If a pupil has a problem with food, the school works carefully to help. One boy would only eat cake. He was coaxed into trying a bit of bread first – and then, bit by bit, weaned onto sandwiches. Another boy wouldn't touch vegetables. Linda made him a deal: if he ate some vegetables every day for a week, she would make him his favourite dish. He asked for chicken nuggets, and she made them for him from scratch, with a crispy coating of brown breadcrumbs.

Turning round the food service at Woodham was expensive – at least at first. The school governors agreed to subsidise the service by up to £20,000 a year while it found its feet. But this subsidy decreased year on year, and is no longer required. Take-up is now 63% (and rising), and the service makes a profit.

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The things that children care about

- Is it **GOOD FOOD**?

The food needs to taste good, smell good, and look good. For some children it is important that it does them good too.

- Can I eat it in an **ATTRACTIVE ENVIRONMENT**?

The area where children eat needs to be attractive, clean and light. It must smell enticing. The acoustics must allow children to hear each other. The school cooks and supervisors should be friendly and engaging.

- Does it fit in with my **SOCIAL LIFE**?

Children must be able to eat with their friends (regardless of whether they have a packed lunch or school dinner). Queues need to be short. It should not be possible to identify free school meals children. Children need to have enough time in their lunch break to eat their meal and then go out to play or attend clubs. The lunch break should not be too late or early in the day.

- Is it sold at a **PRICE** my family can afford?

The price needs to be low enough to compete with packed lunches, so that children from poorer families who don't quite qualify for FSM can still afford to eat well.

- Is the **BRAND** strong?

School food needs to be *the thing* to have. Its reputation among children, parents and teachers needs to be good. This takes role modelling by the cool kids and by teachers. It helps if children are able to get involved in planning the menu and their dining hall environment, growing some of the ingredients or even helping out in the kitchen during lunch. It is also really important that teachers eat with the children.

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What do the schools that serve good food have in common? Often, at first glance, not a lot. And this is important to understand: there are some differences that do not matter.

Every model of food delivery can be made to work wonders. We have eaten first-rate school lunches cooked by local authority caterers, private contractors and in-house caterers. Likewise, there are schools of every type serving fantastic food and

breaking even: primary and secondary, rural and urban, big and small, academies and maintained schools.

There are three things, however that all of these schools do have in common.

1. They adopt what is often called a ‘whole-school approach’. This sounds like jargon, but is actually a very simple concept. It means integrating food into the life of the school: treating the dining hall as the hub of the school, where children *and* teachers eat together; lunch as part of the school day; the cooks as important staff members; and food as part of a rounded education.
2. They have a head teacher who leads the change. One local authority caterer showed us the take-up rates of the different schools in her borough. “The schools with low take-up have one thing in common,” she said. “The head teachers wouldn’t support us. You can forget making things better if the head is not behind the whole thing.”
3. They concentrate on the things children care about: good food, attractive environment, social life, price, brand.

Concentrating on the needs of the children may sound obvious, but it is by no means universal practice. In those schools we visited that were struggling, the top-down ethos of institutionalised service still prevailed. The job of the canteen was to feed children, not to entice them to eat.

Little thought was given to what food they wanted, let alone the other things that were important to them. Often, there was not a single teacher or (in secondary schools) sixth-former eating in the dining hall – conveying an unmistakeable message to the younger children that no one important would eat there if they had a choice.

The strongest single factor behind low take-up is price³⁴ However, talking to children can reveal many other, less obvious reasons. We asked a big group of girls at a school in the Forest of Dean why they didn’t eat school lunches. Was it the food? “No, the food is great. It’s just that we have four sittings for lunch and you can’t choose which sitting you are in. We have packed lunches so that we can hang together. No-one is gonna separate us.”

A London secondary school pupil told us that no-one ate school dinners because they were served in a freezing, draughty hall. “If you have a packed lunch you get to eat in a warm classroom.”

On the other hand, there are some teachers and cooks who go to remarkable lengths to understand the needs of their pupils. We met a pair of primary school

³⁴ See the Appendix slide showing survey evidence that the most common reason for parents giving their children packed lunches is that school dinners are too expensive, and the factor most likely to encourage them to switch to school food would be making them cheaper.

chefs who told us they had spent one lunch break shuffling about the dining hall on their knees, seeing things from a child's perspective. Afterwards they rebuilt the serving area to make the food more visible – and attractive – to four-foot high people.

Every school is different, and every school faces different problems as it tries to improve its food culture. Getting round those problems requires ingenuity. The imaginative solutions that we have come across have been a joy to behold, and form the subject of our next chapter.

ACTION:

Kick-start increased take-up of good school food

provide seed funding for organisations to work with schools to increase take-up of school meals and help them break-even.

There are a number of organisations – many of them charities – that are already successfully working with schools to improve their menus and encourage a broader appreciation of good food (for a full list, see the School Food Plan website: www.schoolfoodplan.com) They help with all sorts of things: negotiating new catering contracts, refitting kitchens and dining halls, consulting children, overhauling menus, cutting queuing times, and fostering a broader appreciation of food through gardening and cooking clubs.

Among their other successes, these organisations have a proven track record of increasing take-up. Schools enrolled in the Food for Life Partnership during 2008, for example, experienced an average increase in take-up of 3.7% in the first year, growing to 5% in the second year, at a time when take-up was declining nationally.

The Department for Education will offer contracts to organisations already working in this sector, to help schools increase their lunchtime take-up. Improving take-up will be their primary goal, and the yardstick by which their success is measured. Each organisation will be required to provide regular reports on take-up rates in the schools it is working with.

Schools whose food services are currently loss-making, and large schools with low take-up, will be the first to receive this help, to ensure maximum impact.

Cost

The total cost of providing this support to 5,000 schools over 18-24 months will be £23.6 million (based on costs of approximately £4,700 per school). Half of this will be covered by the organisations themselves through additional fundraising; the

other half will come from the DfE. The total cost to the government, then, will be £11.8 million – or £5.9 million per year.

Benefits

On average, schools currently lose around £7,100 per year each on school dinners. Even if they only increased take-up by 5% (the absolute minimum we would expect once they have expert help), this would reduce the average loss per school to £850, a saving of over £6,000 per school. Repeated across 5,000 schools this represents a saving of nearly £31 million per year. Taking into account phasing of the benefits, we calculate that the net present value of the project over five years would be in the region of £80 million.

Risks

Clearly, the main risk in this project is that the uplifts achieved are lower than previously experienced. However, the project would still pay for itself even if take-up in the targeted schools rose by a mere 1%. And of course, the financial benefits would be considerable if greater-than-expected gains are realised.

Implementation

To make sure schools get the best help available, applications for this seed-funding will be competitively tendered. Each organisation will be asked to put forward a submission, demonstrating a track record of transforming food culture and increasing take-up in schools, whether locally, regionally or nationally.

Applicants will have to demonstrate that they can leave schools with a framework for continuous improvement, and monitor and evaluate the progress of the school on an on-going basis. They will also have to show how they intend to bring in the necessary funding to match the initial seed fund.

The tender process will be held shortly after the School Food Plan launch. It is anticipated that the successful applicants will begin working with schools from autumn 2013.

Responsibility: Department for Education

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Chapter Five: Imaginative thinking

In which we see how individual schools have found ingenious ways around the problems they face – such as drawing up contracts with caterers, cutting queues, or persuading children to eat their veg – and we set about helping them to share their clever ideas.

As we travelled round England eating school dinners of varying quality, it struck us that there was one thing we urgently needed to do: get schools talking to each other about food.

Every school is different, and every school faces a different combination of challenges as it tries to improve its food. There is no one-size-fits-all template of perfection. But there are particular problems that crop up again and again within certain types of school – from the small rural primary struggling to break even, to the massive urban secondary school battling to squeeze its students into a tiny canteen.

For every difficulty that arises, there is a school somewhere out there that has found a way to fix it. The trouble is, these solutions are not being shared.

This is not through any lack of helpfulness or enthusiasm. Schools (and caterers) that have made great changes are often dying to share their ideas. They feel enormously proud of what they have achieved, and are keen to help others do the same. There are organisations such as the Food for Life Partnership that use ‘flagship’ schools to showcase excellence. But we think much more can be done to help schools come together to share practical ideas and experiences.

Later this year, we will be adding a new section to our website – called ‘What Works Well’ – where schools can do exactly that. But to kick things off, we decided to hold a series of regional ‘town hall’ meetings in schools around the country. We invited teachers, private caterers, in-house and local authority cooks, children, parents, governors, charity workers – anyone who had something to say, or to learn, about school food.

We handed out slips of yellow paper and got everyone to write down a food-related problem that their school had faced, and how they had solved it. Then we stuck the pieces of paper onto a wall made out of cardboard boxes. It was a bit Blue Peter, but effective nonetheless. At every meeting, we ended up with an impressive tower of fluttering yellow: a testament to the progress that is already being made through imagination and ingenuity.

Overleaf you will find just a few examples of clever practices from individual schools. Many, many more will soon be available on the School Food Plan website (www.schoolfoodplan.com). They may be relevant to your school, or they may not. But they should, we hope, get your own creative juices flowing.

Getting the contract right

Seven years ago, the lunch service at East Sheen Primary was truly dreadful. The school, in south west London, was locked into a contract with a substandard local authority caterer. The food was awful, and take-up correspondingly low: only 40 children out of 400 ate school meals (even though nearly 60 children were entitled to get them for free).

The head teacher, Helen Colbert, set up a working party of teachers, governors and parents to turn things around. With the help of a parent with legal expertise, they managed to serve notice on their catering contract without incurring a penalty. They then drafted a “request for proposal” for the school’s next contract – in other words, a highly specific legally-binding list of all the things they wanted from their caterer.

The request was ambitious. As well as cooking healthy, delicious food, the contractor would have to source ingredients locally, help raise funds to refit the

kitchen and support the school's kitchen garden. The contract was won by Pride Catering from Surrey, and the result was dramatic.

Within the first year, take-up shot up to 70%. Today, 320 of the 400 children eat school lunches. The food service makes a tidy profit, which is ploughed back in to help keep prices low and quality high. The vegetable patch is thriving, and the school chef, Will, uses its produce to make fresh, seasonal, imaginative food. Although strictly speaking he is employed by a private contractor, Will is hugely popular with the children, and a valued member of staff.

The transformation didn't stop there. The work of Helen and her team caught the attention of School Food Matters, a local charity, which used the lessons they had learned to transform the food at thirty more primary schools in Richmond. These schools made the switch from serving food cooked off-site and then reheated to cooking everything from scratch. Take-up of the menus – that also meet the Silver Food for Life Catering Mark – doubled.

Captain's Table – persuading children to eat their greens

Gayhursts Community School in east London is one of many primary schools to use a 'Captain's Table' as an incentive for eating and behaving well in the dining hall.

A table is laid every other week in the dining hall, with a table cloth, glasses, and fancy crockery and cutlery. This is the Captain's Table. Every time a child eats a balanced meal (including vegetables) and uses good table manners, he or she gets given a special ticket. Tickets are drawn and children who are chosen are given a golden invitation in assembly and then a three-course feast at the Captain's Table. They are waited on by school staff and have a 'special' adult guest each time.

Farming in schools

Phoenix High School is very far from a rural idyll. Located right in the middle of the socially-deprived White City Estate in west London, with the roar of the six lane A40 in the background, it is perhaps the last place on Earth you would expect to find a farm.

Yet here – in a large plot behind the sixth form block – there are carrots, leeks, onions and herbs growing in neatly-tended vegetable beds. There are greenhouses and abundant fruit trees, as well as rabbit hutches, a hen coop and a colony of bees.

The farm was the brainchild of Sir William Atkinson, the executive head teacher. He wanted to give the children something that very few were getting at home: an intimate understanding of nature.

Phoenix's 1,100 children mostly come from disadvantaged backgrounds: 60% are on free school meals, 65% speak English as a second language, and 65% are on the special needs register. "Many of our children live in very cramped flats," says Sir William. "To some, vegetables come in plastic bags from the supermarket, not out of the ground."

Working on the school farm – planting, weeding, harvesting, caring for the animals – gives children a uniquely hands-on education. They learn about seasonality, the life-cycle of plants and where food really comes from. For those who want to take it further, the school has introduced a City and Guilds qualification in Landbased Studies (horticulture and animal care).

Some of the produce is used in school dinners – much to the children's excitement – and three times a week the school does a pop-up fruit and vegetable stall, selling to the public.

Even so, the farm is expensive to run. There are two full-time gardeners, as well as a small army of community volunteers. It costs around £70,000 a year to keep the venture going: money that comes from the Big Lottery Fund. But the benefits to the school, its children and the wider community have been worth every penny.

Cutting queues

In August 2009, seven secondary schools in Glasgow decided to keep all their 'S1' (year 7) children on site during the lunch break, in a bid to encourage them to make healthier choices. This experiment – dubbed “The Big Eat In”³⁵ – proved so successful that 17 schools have now signed up.

Keeping children on site immediately increased the pressure on existing canteens, and generated long queues. So the participating schools had to think on their feet. They have adopted a number of clever strategies to minimise queuing times.

First, they increased the number of tills in their canteens. Next, they opened a number of collapsible kiosks in other areas around the school, and at the school gate. At first these kiosks could only provide ambient food, but now they have developed hot and chilled food services.

Finally, some schools opened separate café units serving healthy, hot food. The cafés, run by the local authority, each serve 300-350 customers, and have recouped their initial start-up costs within a year³⁶.

Some schools in England are using the same strategies, with the help of private companies. PKL Food Cubes, for example, sets up food kiosks in schools using the catering units they previously supplied to the London Olympics.

Improving packed lunches

Rather than banning packed lunches outright, Ashton Vale Primary School in Bristol resolved to make them as healthy as possible. The school sends out weekly newsletters to parents, explaining what the rules are on packed lunches and why they are important. For example, ‘jam or chocolate spread sandwiches’, it says, ‘do not have the necessary protein to support children’s learning throughout the afternoon’. These rules are all linked to the Eatwell plate so that parents and children all have a clear idea of what a healthy diet looks like.

The teachers reckoned that it wasn’t worth upsetting parents by introducing a compulsory packed lunch inspection, so they tried a subtler approach using both ritual and an incentive. Once a week, children can volunteer to have their lunchbox inspected: those who pass the healthy lunchbox test get a raffle ticket for a prize draw.

More details can be found at:

<http://ashtonvaleprimary.weebly.com/healthy-lunchboxes.html>

Getting parents involved

Getting parents involved has huge benefits for all schools – but especially small ones. Barons Court Primary School, in Southend, has only 186 pupils. Until two

³⁵ More can be found at <http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=9456>

³⁶ Interview with Helena Hailstone of Cordia (Glasgow Caterers, Scottish Government, November 2012)

years ago, it had no food service of its own: meals were delivered from another, larger primary school.

When the school decided to open its own kitchen, it knew it would have to rely heavily on parents and other community members to help out. The school now has its own chef, but volunteers and governors help to prepare the school food every day. For example, one of the mothers makes bread, and there is a governor who peels the potatoes on roast day. To make it easier to tap into the particular skills of volunteers, the school uses a four-week menu of simple dishes, advertised well in advance in its newsletter and on its website.

The food is wholesome and tasty – it recently won the Food for Life Partnership’s bronze award – and the Orchard Bistro is a lovely place to be. Parents can come in and eat with the children any day of the week. As the cook Liz says, “We like to have adults in the hall – the aim was always to have a family-style dining experience.”

Teachers eating with children

In every school we went to that had a good food culture – every single one – the teachers regularly ate lunch with the children.

One of the best meals we had was at the Reach Academy in Feltham, south west London. The children sat at long tables, family style, with teachers scattered among them. Before the food was served, one of the teachers stood up and gave a short speech – almost like a secular grace – about the delicious meal we were about to enjoy. The food was then brought to the tables, and one child at each table was given the task of dishing it up.

At our table, a group of year 7 children (several of whom had come to Reach after struggling at other schools) chatted to a teacher about what they would like to study at university. After lunch, a senior teacher stood up and thanked the cook for the food that had just been eaten. It was a wonderful example of how the dining hall can set the tone for the whole school, encouraging kindness, civility and a sense of togetherness.

Using food to bridge the achievement gap

Nottingham is Britain’s poorest city. Half a mile from the city centre, surrounded by housing estates beset by social problems, is Greenfields Community School.

Some 60% of Greenfields children are eligible for free school meals; 80% come from an ethnic minority background, and a quarter are the children of asylum seekers, refugees or economic migrants. Between them, they speak more than 30 different languages.

Head teacher Terry Smith sees food not just as fuel for his hard-working children, but as a means of expanding their horizons. The introduction of the Pupil Premium – with money paid for each child eligible for free school meals – means the school now gets an extra £90,000 a year (around 8% of its total budget). This money is spent on extra-curricular activities of the kind that help bridge the ‘achievement gap’, such as music lessons, a school counsellor, a Learning Mentor, and cooking and gardening sessions.

A professional gardener comes in once a week to teach the children, as well as tending the veg patch and running the after-school gardening club. Two teachers have also been trained as 'Forest School' practitioners, developing the pupil's outdoors skills. All the children learn to cook at school, using lesson plans developed with the Food for Life Partnership. Lunches – supplied by Nottingham City Catering – are made from locally sourced and organic ingredients.

Educating the children about where food comes from helps them make healthy choices – 65% now eat school meals – but also augments their wider understanding of the world. Greenfields is regularly in the top 10% of schools in the country for its marked progression from key stage 1 to key stage 2 SATs – i.e. from starting school to leaving – and is rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

Demanding more from existing caterers

The food at Ashley C of E Primary School in Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, used to be brought in pre-cooked by council caterers, and dished up into plastic flight trays at a small serving hatch. It was pretty uninspiring, and take-up had sunk to a miserable 27%.

But when head teacher Richard Dunne (a member of our expert panel) told the cooks he wanted to overhaul the lunch service, they rose to the occasion. "As heads, we should have the confidence to say to the local authority: 'This is ok but it could be better'," says Richard. "At the end of the day, they want our business and a high take-up of school meals."

Together, they resolved to start serving high-quality local, seasonal food. For six months the children were obliged to make do with packed lunches while a new kitchen was built so that the food could be cooked from scratch on site. Parents agreed to a rise of 10p (to £2.10) to fund fresh, seasonal fruit and veg and high welfare, organic meat. The children were involved in shaping every aspect of the lunchtime experience, down to choosing the right kind of knife and fork.

Take-up now stands at 70%. Lunch is just one part of a strong curriculum-wide approach to food, which incorporates the school's vegetable plot and fruit tree orchards. Year 1 children learn about and plant wild flowers; year 2 keep bees; year 3 become experts in fruit trees and local varieties of fruit; year 4 look after the soft fruit; year 5 raise the salads; year 6 are in charge of the vegetables. And because the school kitchen uses the children's produce, they are always excited about eating it.

Our town hall meetings also yielded a number of excellent smaller hints and tips:

- One school asked a different class every week to prepare and distribute platters of sliced fruit for break time. This meant children were being encouraged to eat fruit by their peers – leading to a marked increase in consumption.
- Several schools now allow children to look at the lunch menu, choose their meal and pay for it in the morning. They get given a token or colour-coded band, which they hand in at lunchtime in exchange for their meal. Pre-ordering like this helps to reduce wastage, ensure that children can always get their choice of food, and cut queuing times.
- One school introduced a Masterchef-style competition, run by the cooking club, and held the final at a nearby secondary school to give it a greater sense of occasion.

- Another school asked children to devise and cook a low-carbon lunch – to help them learn about some of the environmental impacts of food. They then invited friends from outside school and children from their feeder primaries to join them.
- During food technology lessons at one school, children studied their own school dinners. The school cook came to the classroom to talk about their work, and the children visited the kitchen to try out the equipment. The children were each asked to design a menu for the canteen – and the chef cooked the winning menu for the whole school. The catering staff also teamed up with the food technology teachers to run an after-school cooking club.
- A catering manager in charge of a number of schools wanted to know why some schools had dismally low take-up (as little as 10% in some cases). He talked to the children, and kept hearing that they didn't like the 'flight trays' they were expected to eat off. The catering manager invited children to design new bowls and cutlery, which were then introduced. Take-up has increased.
- Some schools that don't have room for a vegetable garden take on allotments instead. School growing schemes almost always lead to a noticeable increase in children eating their vegetables.
- As well as considering the length of the lunch break, schools should consider what time they start. One large caterer told us that take-up was always higher in schools where the lunch break started earlier in the school day, before the children got so hungry they ate something else.

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ACTION:

Share what works well

Ensure that schools can learn from each other

We want to give head teachers, governors, cooks and caterers easy access to each other's ideas, to help spread best practice faster and wider.

We are putting together a rich, easy-to-access online archive of 'What Works Well'. This will cover a broad range of areas, including: recipes; rotas; training for cooks; managing queues and small dining areas; how to cut costs to increase take-up; a national database of current ingredient cost benchmarks; the role of local and sustainable food in improving take-up; ideas for the curriculum, and for cross-curricular activities such as gardening; using professional kitchens to bulk-cook some items for multiple schools and save cost.

As well as written case studies, the What Works Well archive will contain entertaining short films about schools that have made the change. It will also direct users to excellent material that has already been created by organisations such as the Children's Food Trust and the Food for Life Partnership.

We will make this content 'pervasive': it won't just sit on our website waiting to be seen. Selected case studies will appear on other websites such as YouTube, with links directing users to the entire archive. It will interlink with the websites of all the organisations which have been involved in the School Food Plan.

The Guardian Teachers' network has agreed to create a new page on its website dedicated to school food – using our case studies and providing a link to the archive.

The Times Educational Supplement (TES) website (the internet resource most used by teachers) is also creating a new section dedicated to teaching cooking, with guidance on how to overcome common hurdles (such as teaching cooking in a primary school without a kitchen). Again, this will link to our What Works Well site (for more on the TES site see Chapter Two).

The website will also include a forum to help volunteers make contact with schools that need their help – for example, local chefs, purchasing experts, or gardeners. We have been overwhelmed, practically as well as emotionally, by the number of people who have written to us wanting to get involved.

We will continue to gather examples of what works well in numerous ways. We will be hosting a twice-yearly conference call about international school food, with the leaders of school food programmes in Finland, Sweden, Germany, France and Japan, among others. We will also be engaging with nutritional forums such as the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN)³⁷ keeping abreast of the most important new science related to children's health.

Responsibility: Henry and John

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ACTION:

Set up flagship boroughs to demonstrate the impact of improving school food on a large scale

We want to show that improving school food – and the way children are taught about food – can have a significant and measurable impact on both health and attainment in any given area.

Boris Johnson and his London Food Board have agreed to work with us on just such a project – helping head teachers across two London boroughs transform the food in their schools. If this model proves successful, we hope to use it in councils outside London.

This will be a many-faceted initiative. The idea is to take the lessons we have learnt from schools in Britain and around the world, and apply them across a particular area.

Every school in the named boroughs will receive co-ordinated support from expert organisations (e.g. the Food for Life Partnership or Children's Food Trust). They

³⁷ SACN is an advisory Committee of independent experts that provides advice to Public Health England, other government agencies and departments. Visit [http://www.sacn.gov.uk/for more information](http://www.sacn.gov.uk/for-more-information).

will be able to use this expertise to help them improve their food, set up breakfast clubs, devise brilliant cooking lessons, or get children growing vegetables. Funding will be provided to extend free school meal entitlement or bring down the cost of school meals.

The flagship schemes will also co-ordinate activity in the wider neighbourhoods: for example, working with local take-aways and fast food outlets to make their products healthier, and teaching parents and people in the local community how to cook.

We expect these flagships to become energetic hubs of food-related activity – attracting experts and volunteers from within local communities and around the world.

The DfE has agreed to provide seed-funding of up to £600,000 for this initiative. We will seek charitable funds to match this money. The London Food Board and the Mayor’s Fund have also agreed to match the funding, as well as working with us on implementation.

The DfE and Mayor’s Office will ensure that the impact of the changes – above all on academic attainment – is properly measured.

We are sure that there are other local areas in England where there is a similar desire to change food culture. We would encourage these authorities to bid for the funding to “**Kick-start increased take-up of good school food**” described in Chapter Four.

Responsibility for funding and measuring impact: Mayor’s Office and DfE

Responsibility for implementation: Mayor’s Office

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Chapter Six: Supporting the heroic head teacher

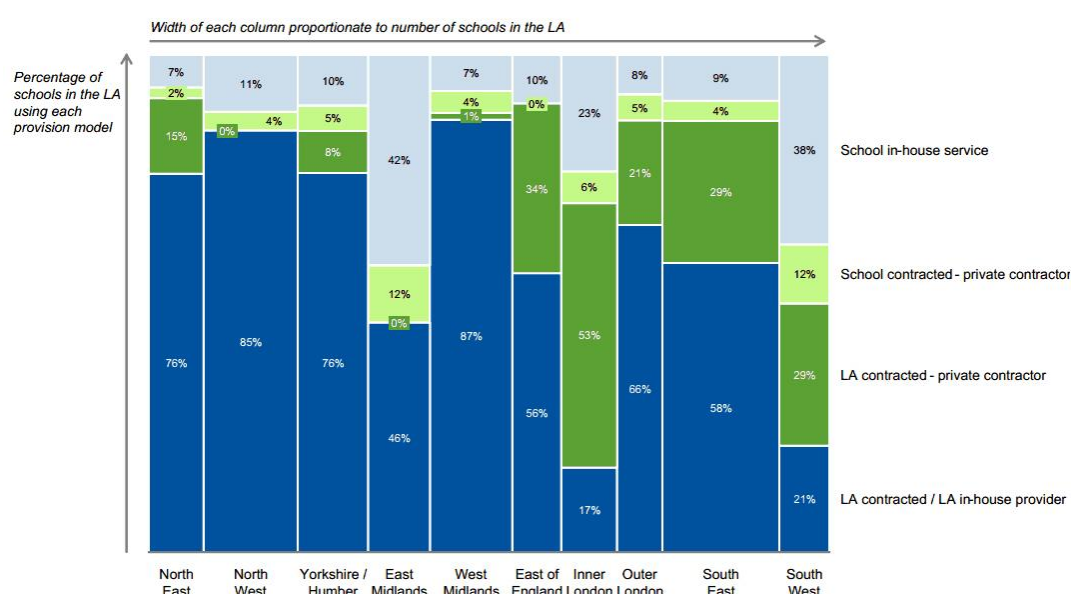
In which we discover that the vast majority of head teachers believe that good food helps children perform better, but some heads feel daunted by the task of improving their school food; and we describe how they can get the support they need.

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Many parents have asked us – why can't the government make school meals better? But the reality is there is a limit to what governments can do. The power to transform a school's food lies, first and foremost, with its head teacher.

Behind any school with a vibrant food culture, there is always an equally vibrant head teacher. He or she may choose to employ a private caterer, have the food cooked in-house or delegate the catering to the local authority, who in turn may do it themselves or contract it out to a private company (see chart, below). There are many different models for improving school food, but one constant: the catalyst is always the head teacher.

Figure 7: Provision model by region: secondary schools, 2012³⁸



We are well aware, however, that our placing so much emphasis on the responsibilities of the head teacher could lead to resentment and even panic. “Another thing the government is asking us to do!”

This is one reason why we have worked closely with a major head teachers’ union in drawing up this plan³⁹, and why we included both primary and secondary school head teachers on our expert panel.

We have found that head teachers – almost unanimously – want to increase the quality and take-up of their school food. But not everyone has the skills or experience they need to do so.

We commissioned a survey of more than 400 head teachers, selected at random: 200 from secondary schools (of which half were academies) and 200 from

³⁸ Excludes schools with no provision or FSM only (<1%) and ‘don’t know’ survey responses (c5%). Based on SFT annual survey, OC&C analysis.

³⁹ Brian Lightman, the general secretary of the union ASCL (which represents school and college leaders), is an active member of the School Food Plan Expert Group. We have also run many of our ideas past Russell Hobby of NAHT.

primaries. A resounding 91% agreed that “eating healthy, nutritious food improves attainment” and a similar proportion believed that it improved behaviour⁴⁰.

However, 41% of primary school heads and 31% of secondary heads said they needed more advice and guidance. One in five felt strongly that “food is on my radar, but is not a priority at the moment”. These heads know there is work to be done, but feel they don’t have the time to do it. They are already run off their feet trying to improve exam results or tackling discipline issues.

But getting the food right need not be a distraction from the more pressing problems of a school: rather, it can be a highly effective way of addressing them. Studies show – and teachers know – that children who eat well do better in exams⁴¹. Likewise, a happy, civilised dining hall improves the atmosphere of the whole school.

To create a food culture they can be proud of, head teachers need support. Below we give several examples of organisations that can offer practical help. We have also included a checklist for head teachers in this plan, detailing the most important things they can do to improve the food in their schools. We will be sending a summary of this to all schools. The actions in the School Food Plan – summarised at the start of this document – lay out the support they need on a national level.

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Understanding head teachers

To understand what support head teachers need, we wanted better to understand their attitudes to school food. We surveyed 400 head teachers, asking them how important they thought providing good school food was (their ‘will’) and how confident they were that they had the skills to ensure they delivered good school food (their ‘skill’).

‘Will’ reflects their commitment to fostering a good food culture within their school. ‘Skill’ reflects their confidence that they can achieve that goal.

This is what heads had to say about themselves.

20% of head teachers said they have both high will and high skill, and a further 5% said they have medium will and high skill. Their schools are mainly urban. Over half are academies. They have the most cashless systems and the fewest tuck shops. 65% of these schools have brought their catering in-house – citing “quality” and “financial reasons” as the two biggest motives for doing so⁴². It is arguable that

⁴⁰ Sarah Kitchen, Eloise Poole, Natasha Reilley, *School Food: Head Teachers’ and School Senior Managers’ Perceptions Survey*, NatCen Social Research, July 2013.

⁴¹ Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy, ‘Statement on The Link Between Nutrition and Cognitive Development in Children’, Tufts University, Medford, MA, 1998.

⁴² This supports our own research, which shows that in-house services cost no more than services provided by external caterers. See the Appendix slide showing the range of food and labour costs per meal for a sample of schools with in-house provision, compared to a sample of LAs providing school food. The range of costs is very wide within either model, but the average costs achieved by each model are very similar.

these head teachers need no extra support, but it never hurts to share ideas. Many of these heads are doing things that other schools could learn from, and vice versa.

45% of heads thought they had high or medium will, and medium skill. These heads told us they do not need convincing that school food is important. What they do need is practical advice and support, which is what this Plan aims to deliver. Many of these schools have breakfast clubs and growing programmes – evidence that they are already making big efforts. In contrast to the high skill/will group, less than 5% do their catering in-house, preferring to use private or local authority caterers instead. The reasons they cite for their choice of provision are "we inherited it" (44%), "financial reasons" (22%) and "because we had to" (19%). These heads need the confidence to push their current provider to improve quality, or to bring their food in-house.

17% of head teachers were honest enough to tell us they had low will. They don't regard school food as a priority. If you are one of those head teachers, we hope to convince you of the benefits of good food – both to your children and to your school's academic performance. We know many head teachers who were once uninterested in creating a positive food culture but who have subsequently transformed the food in their schools.

Lastly, 13% had high or medium will but admitted to low skill. These head teachers want to make things better but they would welcome quite intensive support to turn things around.

Hearing from heads in this way has helped us to understand what help is needed, and where. It has also given us further evidence of the link between head teacher leadership and take-up. Heads with high or medium will and high skill had an average take-up of 61%, way ahead of the national average. The data also reinforces what all the case studies have told us about price. Those with high take-up, will and skill also had the lowest average prices. They have managed to create the virtuous circle of low prices, high take-up, lower fixed costs and increased quality.

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WHERE TO FIND SUPPORT

In your own school

The most important support for any head teacher comes from within the school. Getting the right people on board makes life immeasurably easier. The ideal team includes an energetic business manager or deputy head, a talented and adaptable cook, and at least one determined parent or governor. This is a great opportunity to get children's families involved: cooking and gardening clubs are often best run using enthusiastic volunteers. Finally, critically, children themselves should be given a voice.

Outside your school

There are many private companies, not-for-profit organisations and charities that offer direct advice and support to schools on their school food. A comprehensive list of these is provided on our website, www.schoolfoodplan.com.

ACTION:

Train head teachers –

include food and nutrition in training for head teachers.

In order to foster a good food culture within schools, head teachers themselves need to be well-informed about nutrition, diet and cooking.

The National College for Teaching and Leadership, which sets standards for head teacher training, has agreed that content on food and nutrition should be included in their head teacher programme.

Responsibility: National College for Teaching and Leadership

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ACTION:

Provide support to new local health and wellbeing boards to promote effective practice in improving children's diets in schools.

In April 2013 a new public health system was introduced in England. Local authorities are now in charge of funds for 'public health' which were previously managed by NHS Primary Care Trusts. They will distribute this money through local Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWB). A new national organisation, Public Health England (PHE), has also been set up to improve the public's health and wellbeing. As part of its remit, PHE will offer HWBs evidence based guidance on what works well. Promoting healthy weight and tackling childhood obesity is one of PHE's priorities.

Councils now have a real opportunity to improve the health of local communities, by shifting the emphasis to prevention and wellbeing, alongside treatment. Improving the diets of school children, and teaching them how to feed themselves well for life, is one of the simplest and most effective ways to promote good health. Some local authorities are already taking a lead on this. In Lincolnshire, for instance, the council is funding the Food for Life Partnership to go into schools and help them improve their food culture – through better catering and practical food education.

Public Health England will:

- Share evidence on public health actions that are effective in tackling childhood obesity
- Advise HWBs and authorities on the most effective approaches that can be used in schools to improve children's diets (this may include, for example, recommending funding of healthy eating approaches in schools as one of the best ways of tackling childhood obesity)
- Work with the School Food Plan to create podcasts that share what works well in schools
- Use its social marketing expertise to communicate with children, young people and families. For example, this September Change4Life - PHE'S flagship social marketing campaign, which encourages everyone in England to 'eat well, move more, live longer' - will carry messages about the benefits of school dinners in its national campaign.

Responsibility: Public Health England



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Chapter Seven: A workforce bigger than the Navy

In which we learn that the school food workforce has a range of skills that many in the restaurant trade would envy – but that it lacks status, confidence and sufficient training in some areas of practical cooking; we examine past attempts to tackle these issues; and we welcome a new alliance committed to raising the sector’s game.

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It is misleading to think of today's school caterers as the 'dinner ladies' of legend. Yes, many are working mothers for whom the family-friendly hours are convenient, but we have met male and female chefs, young and old, and many professionals who started out working in pub, hotel or restaurant kitchens.

There are over 60,000 people working in school food – making it a bigger workforce than the Royal Navy⁴³ – and between them they feed 3.1 million children a day. The logistics of catering in over 20,000 schools all over the country are fantastically complicated. There are many different types of school, and many different models of food provision. Kitchens come in all shapes and sizes, budgets vary and so do the people who make up the teams. Furthermore, school cooks may work for three different types of employers: the local authority (56% of schools), a private caterer (32%), or directly for a school that has brought its catering service in-house (12%).

School cooks are expected to do something complex: serve children healthy meals that taste great and can compete with the highly-marketed food available on the high street. And they must do this on a tight budget in a short time each day.

It is a tough assignment. It requires a workforce skilled in cooking, kitchen management, procurement and professional customer service, catering for diners ranging from tiny to teenager. Yet the school food workforce is often overlooked within schools, and is seen by many – and, sadly, often sees itself – as the poor relation of the catering trade.

While some caterers and schools offer excellent training, this is not the norm. Many school cooks learn their kitchen skills on the job. The lucky ones may get to turn their hands to all sorts of things, from buying ingredients and cooking from scratch to butchering their own meat. But in other schools, catering staff may find themselves doing not much more than arranging the food in the serving areas or reheating pre-cooked meals.

Formal training for school catering staff is often patchy. The emphasis tends to be on hygiene and safety training, which are required by law, rather than on cooking. The most recent Children's Food Trust annual survey found that the vast majority (90%) of local authorities offered their catering staff training in Food Hygiene, Basic Induction and Food Safety, but only 19% offered the level 2 Kitchen Skills Diploma, which actually teaches cooking⁴⁴.

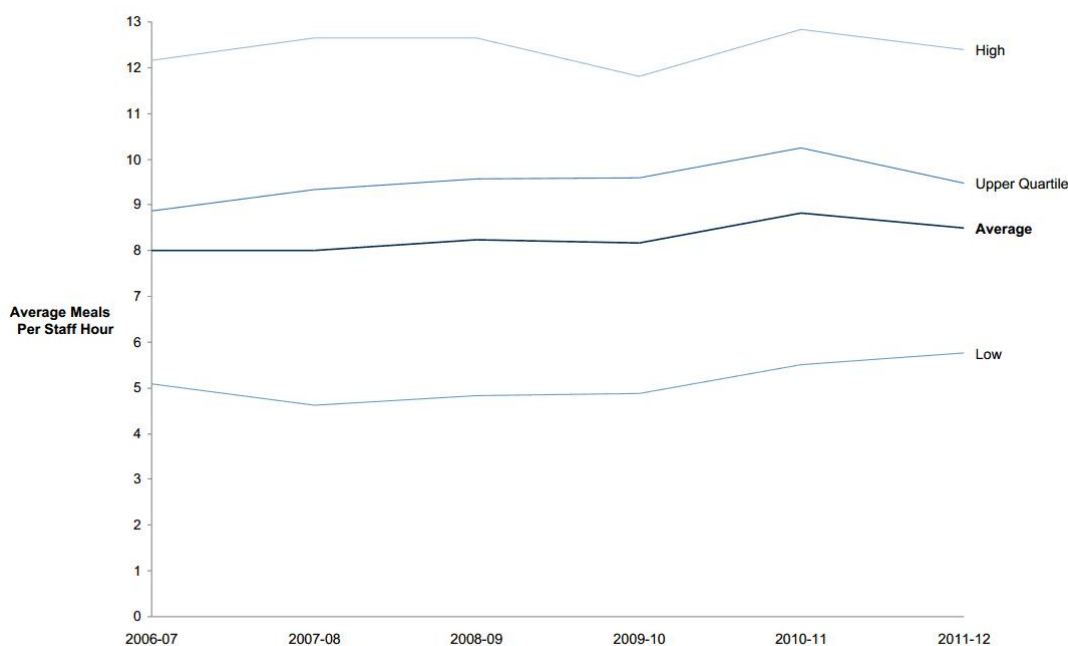
As a result the level of skill among school cooks varies widely. This is reflected in a 2010 study by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), which measured the efficiency of staff in a sample of school kitchens. It found that

⁴³ There is no full national survey of school cooks. But in the School Food Trust's 7th annual survey, there were 25,969 school-based catering staff and 552 non-school-based catering staff in just 48 local authorities (roughly one third of the country). There are approximately 36,000 individuals in the Royal Navy. (Source: MOD, http://www.dasa.mod.uk/publications/people/military/quarterly_personnel_report/_20130401_1_april_2013/Table3a.html?PublishTime=08:30:00)

⁴⁴ Nelson et al, *Seventh Annual survey of take-up and school lunches in England*, School Food Trust, July 2012.

productivity rates in some primary kitchens were as high as 13.3 meals per staff member, per hour. In other kitchens, that rate was as low as 4.8⁴⁵.

*Figure 8: Average meals per staff hour*⁴⁶



There are a number of reasons for these differences, including the size of the school, the adequacy of the equipment, the layout of the kitchen, and the degree to which the kitchen is cooking from scratch. But skill levels undoubtedly play a major part in overall productivity. As caterers ourselves, we could see this plainly on our visits to school kitchens.

* * *

None of this comes as news to the school food sector. It is something that the profession has been attempting to tackle for some time.

In April 2013 we brought together some of the leaders in the school food workforce in an attempt to get some traction on the issue. We heard from representatives of LACA (a professional body primarily made up of caterers), the Children’s Food Trust, the Academy of Culinary Arts, UNISON, ISS Education (a private caterer) and People1st (an employer-led group representing hospitality, passenger transport, travel tourism and retail), as well as from Jeanette Orrey, the school cook who co-founded the Food for Life Partnership and whose pioneering work inspired Jamie Oliver.

We started by talking through the efficacy of previous training initiatives in the school food sector. It would be fair to say that not all of these had the impact that had been hoped for. They included:

⁴⁵ 10-37 Catering Efficiencies Briefing, APSE, July 2012.

⁴⁶ Based on APSE data for a sample of c.70 local authorities.

1. Regional training centres – known as School FEAST (Food Excellence and Skills Training) centres – set up by the Children’s Food Trust to provide accessible, high-quality training for the school workforce.

Our panel had mixed views as to the efficacy of these centres. Although they were never intended to train the entire workforce, they do appear to be underused by schools and caterers. Of the 56 local authorities that responded to the Children’s Food Trust survey last year, only eight (or 25%) had provided training via the School FEAST network. We were told that it is very hard to get catering staff to attend training courses off-site (many have young families to look after). Furthermore, head teachers and caterers have often been reluctant to pay the costs of covering for absent staff, on top of training fees.

2. Creating a specific qualification for school cooks.

LACA has been working with People 1st and others to develop a qualification to meet the specific needs of school cooks. Although good progress has been made towards developing this practical qualification - and it is considered to be of a high standard - it still requires formal accreditation from an examining body.

3. The ‘Support Workforce in Schools’ (SWiS) NVQ level 2 and 3 qualification.

This qualification is particularly suited to, and popular with, dinner supervisors rather than chefs. Although a good starting point to help catering staff understand their role in the school context, it doesn’t provide the culinary training necessary to cook in a busy kitchen.

4. Embracing flexible technology to help with training.

ISS told us about their innovative use of technology. They have started downloading their training materials onto tablet computers, and plan to give one to every school kitchen. Staff can refer to the tablet if they need to, say, double-check a recipe, or look up health-and-safety procedures (we do a similar thing in our restaurants). During quieter moments, staff can also run-through tailor-made training programmes on the computer. This is proving a great success, as the training fits around the needs of both the employee and their kitchen team. And there is potential to take it further still. The Children’s Food Trust has just released its Learning Network programme as a new e-learning facility, with online tutorials and webcasts for people working in school food.

There were two questions that kept cropping up in our discussion:

- Should training be specific to the school food workforce or more generic to the profession?
- Should training be on-site or off site?

We believe that school cooks should be seen – and see themselves – as part of the broader catering profession. The core skills that are required of them are the same as if they were cooking in a restaurant or a hospital. Ideally, they should be trained in skills that are transferable across the profession, giving them more flexibility – and status – in their careers.

As for where they should be trained: the reality is that all cooks do most of their learning on the job. There will always be a role for offsite training courses – a change of scene and an inspirational teacher can work wonders – but the priority must be to ensure there is high-calibre training on site.

The best on-going training in the catering sector is done using a cascading process known as ‘train-the-trainer’⁴⁷. Like all forms of training, it can be bolstered by the clever use of technology. It is no surprise to us that the introduction of flexible technology has proven more effective than the FEAST centres. We expect the Children’s Food Trust Learning Network to be a hit⁴⁸.

* * *

There are some problems that are better solved from the bottom up than the top down. The training of school cooks is one.

The best schools and catering companies already provide their staff with high-quality training. More will do so if the demand is there. While it is unquestionably the role of catering organisations to ensure that their staff are skilled and motivated, they have a much greater incentive to do so if they can see that the head teacher is serious about improving the food service.

Standards are always higher in schools where the cooks have a close relationship with the senior leadership team, and where that team takes an interest in the recruitment and training of the catering staff. If you are a head teacher who hasn’t asked about the training your catering staff get, please do.

This also applies to the dinner supervisors (who are generally hired directly by the school). They have an important role in creating a welcoming atmosphere in the canteen and encouraging children to eat well. Too often, dinner supervisors are seen as no more than crowd control, with little training, recognition or opportunity for career development.

It is up to all of us – parents, children and teachers – to keep up the pressure from the bottom. Schools that demand a lot from their caterers generally get it: and that means happy, well-trained cooks, as well as happy, well-fed children.

ACTION:

Improve skills of the workforce

Develop a more structured approach to training and qualifications for school caterers

⁴⁷ More than 100,000 “gamesmakers” poured onto the streets for London 2012. These volunteers had been trained using a clever “cascading” system. A small number of experts trained the most willing and adept volunteers. These volunteers then trained a group of other volunteers, and so on. This “train the trainer” model is almost exactly the same as the one we use with our own staff at Leon.

⁴⁸ To find out more, visit www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/learningnetwork
http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/assets/sft_nutrition_guide.pdf

The members of our workforce discussion panel, led by LACA, have agreed to set up a public-private alliance of school caterers. This will:

- Create a set of commonly-accepted professional standards, detailing, by levels of required competence or responsibility, what skills should be expected of school catering staff in different positions (i.e. degrees of expertise in knife work, food presentation, management, procurement and so on).
- Identify the most useful and effective of the existing training courses available to school cooks – covering everything from cooking to management and budgeting. In particular, encourage school caterers to make more active use of government apprenticeship schemes.
- Promote training: we all know training is important, but there is always a list of reasons why now isn't quite the right time (money, cover, time, etc). This new alliance wants to find ways to recognise those brilliant employers who invest in the success of their employees – perhaps by creating a new award within existing catering awards schemes.

Responsibility: LACA

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ACTION:

Bring school cooks closer to the rest of the catering sector

School chefs seldom meet or socialise with people from other areas of catering, such as restaurant chefs, farmers or food importers. They have little opportunity to make contacts or pick up new ideas from outside their immediate professional sphere.

We want to bring the school food workforce into closer contact with the rest of the industry, by including them in the high-profile trade events attended by other catering professionals. Two such annual events – ‘Lunch’ and ‘Hotelympia’ – have already agreed in principle to include a school food section, hosted by high-profile chefs.

This will give school chefs a chance to network, gain confidence, be inspired and entertained. They will be able to explore beyond the school food section and to listen to keynote speakers from across the industry. They will meet all sorts of people working with food: farmers, wholesalers, importers of specialty foods, kitchen equipment manufacturers, advisers, etc.

Including school chefs in such an event is one way of giving them the recognition they deserve, boosting both their status and their morale. And because they will be joining an existing event, we can avoid the costs of starting a new one.

Jamie Oliver has also agreed to find opportunities to include school chefs in his media development, to feature them on his Food Tube channel and in his magazine, and to encourage others to include school cooks in various national food awards.

Responsibility: Henry and John

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Chapter Eight: Getting regulation right

In which we find ourselves under a political storm

cloud; we consider the complexities of regulating school

food; we conclude that it may be possible to create a

simpler set of regulations; and we set about doing so.

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Much of our work on this plan was carried out under the storm clouds of a row about regulation.

Between 2006 and 2009, the Labour government introduced legislation requiring all schools to comply with specific food-based and nutrient-based standards. The primary objective of these standards was to create healthy eating habits and ensure that the food served in schools provided a significant proportion of the energy and nutrients needed by children during the school day. This was important for all children, but especially for children from poorer households, for whom the school meal might be the most important of the day.

In 2010, the coalition government announced that the funding contracts for newly-established academies and free schools would no longer include a requirement to abide by those standards. People who had fought for years to get the standards in place were incensed.

The furious debate that followed drowned out discussion of any other aspect of school food. From the outside you could be forgiven for thinking that all you needed to do was extend the regulatory standards to all schools to ensure children would eat well. “Why do we need a review of school food?” we were often asked. “Just put the regulations back in place.”

But the more research we did, the less straightforward the argument became. And, as is often the case with big arguments, there was evidence to support each point of view.

* * *

To understand this debate, it is first necessary to understand how the standards have been implemented in schools so far. There are, as we have said, two types of standards – food-based and nutrient-based – with which schools have to comply. Interim food-based standards for lunches were introduced in 2006 and extended to cover food other than lunch in 2007. Final versions of the food-based standards, complemented by nutrient-based standards, were introduced in primary schools in 2008, and in secondary schools and special schools in 2009.

The food-based standards determine the types of food and drink a school must offer (and how often it must offer them) and what types of food and drink are restricted or cannot be served⁴⁹. Sugary drinks, for example, cannot be sold in any school, while schools must serve at least one portion of fruit and one of vegetables per pupil every day at lunchtime. The food-based standards apply across the school day, including breakfast, mid-morning break, lunchtime, and food served after school. The nutrient-based standards apply only at lunchtime.

⁴⁹ These standards are based on an assessment of the nutritional quality of the various foodstuffs.

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Summary of existing standards, applicable in all maintained schools and any academies founded before 2010

Food-based standards (FBS) cover all food served in schools throughout the day – including break-time snacks, breakfasts and anything served at after-school clubs. Nutrient-based standards (NBS) only cover the food served at lunchtime.

Food-Based Standards:

- set the requirements for minimum servings of fruit, vegetables, and oily fish
- state the minimum meat content for meat products
- limit the number of times less healthy food (e.g. deep fried food, starchy food cooked in oil, meat products) can be served
- ban certain categories of food: confectionery, sweetened soft drinks, snacks such as crisps

Nutrition Based Standards specific to different age and sex groups:

- require minimum levels of nine nutrients (including vitamins, iron, calcium, and zinc)
- limit the content of fat, saturated fat, non-milk extrinsic sugar and salt
- specify an average energy content +/- 5%
- apply to an 'average' lunch over a menu cycle lasting for no less than one and no more than four consecutive weeks

NBS are typically assessed by the caterers themselves through a computer analysis of planned menus. How this happens varies considerably: a local authority or catering company may have paid a one-off cost of around £9,000 p.a. for a programme for all its schools, some schools may have had help from a local authority food-in-schools nutritionist and some schools may have paid for recipes to be analysed privately, which can cost about £20 per recipe. Although maintained schools (and academies founded before 2010) are legally required to abide by these standards, schools and school governors are responsible for ensuring that standards are met, and for keeping records of how this is achieved. Standards are not monitored by Ofsted inspectors, who lack the skills and time to make accurate assessments.

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The nutrient-based standards set out the levels of specific micronutrients (e.g. iron or zinc) that must be incorporated into the lunch menu. They also place limits on sugar, salt, fat, saturated fat and energy. The average secondary school lunch in a

mixed-sex school, for example, must contain about 646 calories (give or take 5%) and at least 3.3mg of zinc. The calculations are made by putting the recipes, portion sizes and the estimated number of portions a child would eat over the course of a one to four week menu cycle into a computer programme, which then works out the energy and nutrients. Nutrient-based standards only apply at lunchtime.

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The campaign for the existing school food standards to be mandatory in all schools is spearheaded by a group called 'Save Our School Food Standards!' which is made up of the Jamie Oliver Foundation, The Food for Life Partnership, School Food Matters, the Children's Food Campaign and LACA. Our expert panel includes representatives from three of these groups.

Early on, we sat down with the campaigners to listen to their point of view. They argued that research by the Children's Food Trust showed that the nutritional quality of school food had improved significantly since the standards were launched – which is true. They felt that new academies, freed from legal constraint, would be unable to resist the financial gains that could be made by selling children chocolate, crisps and other foods and drinks currently restricted in maintained schools. Their fear was that, as more and more schools became academies, all the good work to date would be undone.

The Department for Education's position was – clearly – different. The academy programme – created by New Labour and accelerated by the coalition government – is founded on the idea that excellence stems from good leadership, and that the best way to support head teachers is to give them plenty of freedom.

The government's view is that excessive regulation stifles creative thinking, and that good head teachers will want to maintain high standards anyway – in food, as in other areas – as a matter of pride.

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As we went about our work we amassed evidence supporting both sides of the argument. Dr Susan Jebb, head of Diet and Population Health at the Medical Research Council's nutrition unit, took us through research from America showing that food standards only really work when they are backed by legislation (in those US states where food standards are voluntary, they have had much less impact)⁵⁰.

In Britain, the quality of school food improved rapidly after the introduction of the current standards⁵¹. This improvement, it is worth noting, has been particularly marked in relation to major food groups.

For example, the number of primary school children eating the required amount of vegetables with their meals rose by almost 15 percentage points, from 59% in 2005 to 74% in 2009⁵². In secondary schools, the number of children eating starchy food cooked in oil fell by two-thirds between 2004 and 2011. Their meals had at least 30% less fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar than before⁵³.

⁵⁰ S Jebb, S Kirk, J Poulter, "A review of the evidence on the impact of nutritional standards for school food provision in England", MRC, Human Nutrition Research (forthcoming).

⁵¹ These improvements were an average across the country. Data from the Children's Food Trust shows that many schools are still not compliant with the standards.

⁵² Haroun, Hall, Nelson et al, *Primary School Food Survey 2009*, School Food Trust and TNS-bmrb, 2010.

⁵³ Nelson et al, *Secondary school food survey 2011: school lunch provision, selection and consumption*, School Food Trust, 2011.

In primary schools, increases in the levels of vitamin A, folate and fibre were observed after the introduction of nutrient-based standards. The impact was more variable in secondary schools, however. Vitamin A, fibre and calcium intakes all rose, but folate, zinc, iron and vitamin C levels actually decreased slightly in secondary schools. The reasons for this are complex and varied. Iron levels, for example, probably fell because school meals now contain more vegetables and less meat. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. What it shows is that controlling the intake of micronutrients is harder and less predictable than controlling the intake of major food groups.

Having looked closely at the evidence, we believe the Blair government was right to introduce standards into schools. The legislation clearly brought about a sea change in food provision in schools, although more remains to be done.

We do not believe that there is an immediate risk that things will fall apart in academies. On the contrary, some of the best school food we have eaten has been in academies, and many are going far beyond the norm in their efforts to create an inspiring food culture. In our survey of head teachers, 97% of those in academies believed that "eating healthy, nutritious food improves behaviour" (compared with 85% of head teachers in maintained schools⁵⁴). We were also approached by many free schools who wanted advice on setting up a first-class food service (among other things, we always advised them to ban packed lunches from the start).

In 2012 the Children's Food Trust did a study of the food provision at six academies, chosen at random from across the country. It concluded that they were doing no worse than other secondary schools in complying with the food-based standards at lunch - and sometimes better⁵⁵. But it is worth noting that academies studied by the Children's Food Trust in a separate survey were significantly more likely than maintained schools to serve unhealthy but profitable snacks at mid-morning break⁵⁶.

We know that there is a tendency for school food to mirror what is available more broadly in society. And we know from international evidence that rules are only followed when they are backed up by law. To guard against the reintroduction of the worst practices, it is necessary to have some sort of safety net in place.

• • •

But legal standards are not a panacea – and they don't always work as smoothly as one might hope. On our visits to schools we became increasingly aware that, for some, implementing the standards is causing unexpected and significant problems.

First, they can create a false sense of security. Passing a law does not ensure that children eat well. There are many different ways in which the standards can be – and are – undermined:

1. The standards can be misinterpreted when drawing up menus.

⁵⁴ This survey reached a random sample of 404 head teachers across England. Of these, 202 were from Primary schools and 202 were from Secondaries. 107 were Academy heads.

⁵⁵ Nelson et al, Food and academies – a qualitative study, Children's Food Trust, 2012.

⁵⁶ http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/assets/research-reports/Secondary_school_food_study_analysis_acad_vs_other.pdf A telephone survey of 100 randomly selected academies in England showed that 17% were selling confectionery and chocolate (vs 5% in maintained schools), 25% were selling crisps and savoury snacks (vs 2% in maintained schools), and over 75% were selling sweetened drinks not allowed under the standards (vs 36% in maintained schools).

We have been to schools where the chefs believed they were following the standards, but one glance at the menu showed us that they weren't. The most common problem we found was that schools did not realise food-based standards existed for mid-morning break, as well as for lunch. We also encountered caterers who hadn't read the food-based standards carefully enough, or who miscalculated the nutritional standards when they ran their menus through the computer.

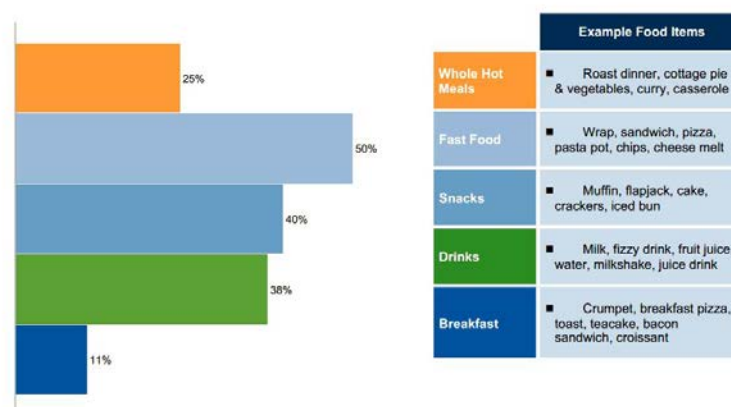
2. The food prepared may not match the theoretical recipes.

School chefs need to have recipes that work, access to the right ingredients and the skills to be able to cook the recipes correctly. A heavy hand with the seasoning, for example, may mean that the food is saltier than the standards prescribe.

3. Children do not always put the right food on their plate.

What children put on their plate will not necessarily match the theoretical menu on which the nutritional calculations are based. This is a bigger problem in secondary schools, where children are generally given more choice. While the impact of the standards on the average lunch was clearly of benefit, many children still pick the less healthy dishes – or, indeed, the less healthy days. Friday – known as 'fish and chip Friday' in many schools – is, unsurprisingly, the most popular day of the week to eat school food. The degree to which children cherry-pick their school lunches can be seen in the chart below, which shows what a sample of 4,900 secondary pupils actually chose in October and November 2012⁵⁷.

Figure 9: Type of food bought: percentage of transactions including each type of food⁵⁸



4. Children do not always eat what is on their plate.

Even at primary schools, where children have less choice about what goes onto their plate, there is no guarantee that the food will be eaten. The variations in quality of school food means that, while there are stacks of empty plates in some schools, there are full waste bins in others.

5. Most children don't eat school meals.

⁵⁷ This is a subset of the 15,000 pupil data set analysed in Chapter Ten.

⁵⁸ Based on ParentPay data and a sample of 4,943 transactions in autumn 2012. Transactions classified into food types by OC&C.

Almost 60% of children don't eat a school lunch at all.

To ensure that children eat well, it is not enough to cook nutritious food. You also need the children to choose school meals, put the good stuff on their plates and then eat it. As we have seen, the only way to improve the choices that children make is to adopt the 'whole school approach'.

This is not an argument for ditching standards, but it reinforces the fact that (as the campaigners for the reintroduction of standards would agree) they are only one part of the solution.

The second problem that we saw repeatedly was the bureaucracy created by the nutrient-based standards. Analysing the nutritional content of a dish requires a specialised (and expensive⁵⁹) computer programme. There are some schools (and some technologically savvy chefs) that manage to do this in-house, and in fact enjoy it; but for many it is a daunting experience.

As a result, the computer analysis tends to get done centrally by the relevant contracted caterer, which then sends out a nutritionally-approved rotating menu cycle (covering the whole term) for all the schools it serves. It is a finicky process – and frustratingly easy to foil. Many caterers told us they spent hours fiddling about with recipes trying to make the computer say "yes", only to see children make a mockery of their efforts by assembling a plate full of food that looks nothing like the fantasy meal.

The nutrient-based standards – as well as making the creation of menus a technocratic rather than joyful experience – are holding some cooks back from being creative. A chef who is simply handed a three-week nutritionally-approved menu from on high has little freedom to source seasonal or local food, take advantage of price fluctuations, create dishes that suit their particular talents, or cater to the preferences of the children at their school.

One teacher, at a primary school in Southall, bemoaned the fact that the school cook – an Asian woman, cooking for predominantly Asian children – wasn't allowed to make them the kind of food they (and she) loved. Instead of dishing up curries or dhosas – healthy food that the children would have wolfed down – she was obliged to serve them shepherd's pie and fish fingers, as dictated by her catering company's three week menu. Her considerable culinary talents were going to waste, and take-up was stubbornly low.

Restricting cooks in this way is a real problem, because it is creativity, adaptability and engagement with children that helps generate the 'whole school' ethos which encourages children to choose good food.

When we discussed this issue with school cooks we found that some enjoyed working with the standards as they are, but many felt that the nutrient-based standards were causing practical problems that restricted the creativity of their menus.

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At this point we started asking school cooks and nutritionists: might it be possible to achieve the same positive effects with a simpler set of standards? The food-based standards on their own, for example, are easier for everyone to understand. It is also easier to assess whether schools are sticking to them: you don't need a computer programme to tell you that a menu of hot dogs and hamburgers doesn't fit the bill.

⁵⁹ For an individual school to use the available software can cost £9,000 (roughly £1,250 for initial registration and essential training, then a charge for each recipe analysed, which adds up rapidly when applied to every recipe in a three-week menu cycle and variations of menu each term)– more than most can comfortably afford. For caterers who cover more than one school, the cost can obviously be shared.

If we could create an effective set of food standards, built on a nutritional framework, would the professionals support it? We received an almost unanimous “Yes”. Followed by: “But it’s a big if”.

When we put the question to Dr Susan Jebb, she sounded interested but sceptical. Then, a few weeks later, she came back to us with some surprising research. It was an analysis of the food eaten by children in a handful of primary and secondary schools in 2007 – during the brief period when the food-based standards had been introduced, but not the nutrient-based ones⁶⁰.

The research showed that, despite only following the food-based standards, these schools met or exceeded the current nutrient-based guidelines. It should be said that they were all schools with an existing culture of good food, which may have skewed the results. Nevertheless, it raised the possibility that the right set of food-based standards – carefully crafted by nutritionists – might be just as effective.

We next floated the idea past Dr Helen Crawley, a public health nutritionist who was closely involved in developing the existing standards. She saw some potential pitfalls. There was a risk that if simpler food-based standards were too loosely worded they might not deliver adequate nutrition across all schools (which is of particular concern for poorer children). But if they were too tightly worded they might actually prove more restrictive than the current legislation.

In 2011, a new set of food-based standards for early years settings in England (catering for children aged 1-4 years) was put together by the Children’s Food Trust steered by an expert panel, including Dr Susan Jebb and Dr Helen Crawley. These standards were built on a nutritional framework, but removed the need for early years providers (e.g. nurseries and school reception classes) to make the nutrient calculations themselves. Instead, they gave clear food-based guidance accompanied by practical advice on recipes and portion sizes. We have taken these standards as a useful starting point.

An integrated food-based approach across early years, primary and secondary schools would seem an obvious solution to the standards debate, and a way of ensuring that good food is part of children’s lives from the beginning of their education.

Helen has agreed to work with Susan and the expert panel in devising and testing a new set of food-based standards for schools. You can find the terms of reference for this work in the appendix. We want to get the standards absolutely right. They will, of course, be put out for consultation and tested in schools. We are aiming to create something simple enough that a parent could stick the basic principles on their fridge, not only to get a sense of what their child is eating at school but to help them think about the food they serve at home.

Food based standards are likely to be cheaper to implement, since they don’t require a computer programme (although any standards require caterer time and engagement). They should also be easier to monitor. It will be easier for a head teacher to tell whether their menus are compliant; and we hope that by studying the menu, rather than computer-generated charts, they will become more engaged with the sort of foods being served.

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: maintained schools and all new academy and free schools.

⁶⁰ School Food Trust, *A guide to introducing the Government’s food-based and nutrient-based standards for school lunches*, 2007. This is available at: http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/assets/sft_nutrition_guide.pdf.

Of course, no standards are completely fool-proof. It takes time to encourage children and young people to choose a healthy and balanced range of foods, particularly in secondary schools. A whole-school approach, led by the head teacher, is the only way to make children enthusiastic about eating well. But we hope these standards will serve as a useful safety-net, ensuring that children are served nutritious food and protecting them from the worst excesses that we have seen in the past.

* * *

ACTION:

Introduce food-based standards for all schools

test and introduce a set of revised food based standards (built on a nutritional framework) for all schools

It is vital to get the standards right. How this will be done is further described in Appendix B.

The evaluation of the revised standards will be completed by January 2014. There will then be a twelve-week period of consultation. Once agreement has been reached, the new regulations will be put into legislation. We expect them to come into force for all maintained schools by September 2014, and a requirement to abide by them will be added to the funding contracts of new academies and free schools shortly thereafter.

All academies that were established prior to 2010 already have clauses in their funding agreement that require them to comply with the national standards for school food. All those that are founded after the publication of this plan will have a similar clause written into their contracts. That still leaves a subsection of academies that were founded between these dates, and had no such clause written into their standards. Rather than introduce cumbersome new legislation to introduce a post-dated clause, we are approaching academies to sign up them up voluntarily to the new standards. So far, all the big academies chains that we have spoken to have been willing (in fact eager) to do this. They include: E-ACT, Ormiston Academies Trust, Harris Federation, Oasis Community Learning multi-academy trust, the School Partnership Trust, United Learning Trust, Academies Enterprise Trust, and the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust. We are confident that other academies will follow suit.

All standards need to be monitored if they are to be effective, and the DfE has agreed to visit a random sample of schools every year. More extensive action would only be necessary if the percentage of schools complying fell below a set level.

Responsibility: Department for Education

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Chapter Nine: Small Schools

In which we consider the particular finances of small schools, the importance of keeping their kitchens open, and how we can support them.

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One of the main themes in education over the past 25 years has been the gradual shift of accountability for schools from local authorities to schools themselves (specifically to head teachers, governors and sponsors). The most recent example of such a shift is called ‘delegated funding’, and has implications for the school food service. To understand how we should respond to this new method of funding, we need to understand why it was introduced. And to do that, we need to go back some way.

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Until 1988, school budgets were not controlled by the schools themselves, but by their local authorities. It was Kenneth Baker, then Tory Education Secretary, who handed the purse strings over to head teachers and governors, in his 1988 Education Reform Act. Although the council was still allowed to hold some money back for central services, state schools could, for the first time, recruit or dismiss staff and carry out small capital projects without constant referral to the local authority.

The next major shift in accountability came with the academy programme – created by the Blair government under the direction of Lord Adonis⁶¹. Adonis believed that radical action was required to turn around what he described as England’s ‘failing comprehensives’. He argued that the key to success was to allow schools greater freedom, more scope for individuality, and strong internal leadership. Labour began the process of closing underperforming schools and opening academies in their place. These were independent of the local authority, had strong governance, and were funded directly by central government.⁶²

Since it came to power in 2010, the coalition government has pursued the Academy programme with vigour. As well as turning failing schools into academies, it has allowed high-achieving schools to convert without changing their governance, and authorised the creation of ‘free schools’: completely new schools, often founded by charities or groups of parents, with the same independent governance as an academy. When the coalition came to power, 203 schools were academies. That number is now 2,225 (out of a total of 20,086 primary and secondary schools in England).

Both Labour and the Coalition have also tried to give schools more control over their own budgets through the gradual shifting of funds from local authorities to schools. ‘Delegated funding’ means that, instead of leaving a sizeable chunk of their funding with the local authority, in exchange for a range of centralised services, schools now have control of all but a tiny proportion of their own budgets.

English secondary schools have been funded this way in increasing measure since 1990; and many local authorities have chosen to delegate the funding for their primary schools, too. It isn’t hard to see why schools and councils alike might prefer

⁶¹ Andrew Adonis: *Education, Education, Education: Reforming England’s Schools*, Biteback, 2012.

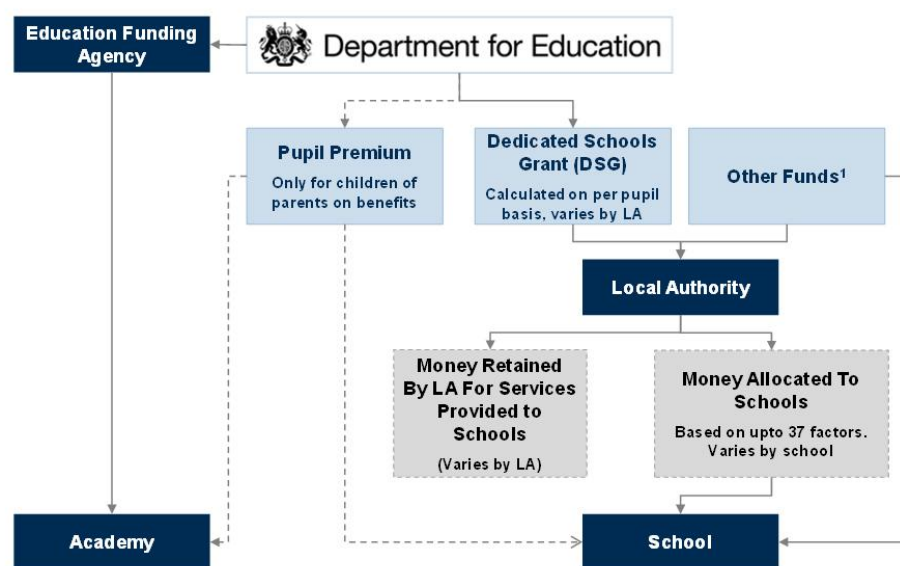
⁶² Adonis credits the inspiration for academies to another of Baker’s 1998 reforms: the creation of City Technical Colleges. These were state schools with independent governance which, although small in number, had tremendous academic success.

the delegated funding system. The old method was complicated enough to bring on palpitations. The chart below shows how it used to work – but perhaps doesn't convey the full thicket of complexity.

First, the government gave each local authority a dedicated schools grant (DSG). Then the local authority decided how to distribute that money between each of its schools. Many different factors could be taken into account: everything from the income level in its catchment area to, in some local authorities, whether or not the school had a cesspit. One council used 37 different factors in allocating its annual school funds. At this level of complexity, funding decisions were both hard to make and hard for other people to understand. But it didn't end there.

Since 2011, every school has received (in addition to the DSG grant) a 'pupil premium' directly from government for each FSM-eligible pupil it has taught in the past six years.

Figure 10: Previous flow of funding



On top of that, both schools and local authorities often get smaller amounts of money from other government departments, charities, endowments, sponsorships and so on. Until 2011, for example, councils were given a £10.17 'school lunch grant' per child per year, which was ring-fenced to spend on school food⁶³. This money is no longer ring-fenced, but many councils have continued to give it to schools with instructions to spend it on food.

In an attempt to make the system "fairer, simpler, more consistent and transparent"⁶⁴, the coalition government has introduced legislation to extend delegated funding across all primary schools that are under local authority control.

⁶³ This money was specifically designated to raise the nutritional quality of school food.

⁶⁴ *School funding reform: Arrangements for 2013-14*, DfE, 2012.

This legislation – which came into force across England in April 2013 – does two things.

First, it puts almost all funding – including that for school meals – directly under the control of individual schools⁶⁵. Second, it reduces to a maximum of 12 the number of factors a council can use in deciding how to allocate money to schools, and these factors have been set by the government⁶⁶. One of these factors – an adjustment for small schools in rural areas, called the sparsity factor⁶⁷ – was added later than the rest (in June 2013), and will apply from 2014/15. It has particular relevance to school meals. But we will come to that later.

On the face of it, this legislation should not have affected the way in which schools provide their lunches. There has been no cut in overall funding levels; only a change in the way the money is distributed. In any case, 80% of England's 152 local authorities had already largely delegated the funding for school food. That leaves only 20% of councils that were, until now, operating under the old system.

These are the areas where schools have tended to leave their school food budget with the local authority. In return, the council would provide catering for schools across the authority – a system that allowed it to subsidise loss-making lunch services in small schools with the profits from larger ones.⁶⁸

To understand how this system of cross-subsidy used to work, we took a close look at the accounts for one council caterer.

...

Havering is an average-sized local authority in Greater London. Its catering service provides the food for 46 primary schools, seven secondary schools and three special schools. Gerry Clinton, who runs the service, showed us round some of his schools. The food was pretty good and the teachers and children we met liked it. He has won a Gold Food for Life Catering Mark for the care he takes in his sourcing. He prices his primary school lunches at a reasonable £2.00.

Back at his office, Gerry talked us through his accounts for the previous year, prior to the delegated funding legislation (from April 2012 to April 2013). Gerry took £4.6 million of revenue from the schools service that year. This came from four main sources: £3.5 million that children (and teachers) actually paid for school

⁶⁵ *School Funding Reform: Next Steps Towards A Fairer System*, DfE, 2012: "There are four other services that some local authorities have delegated in the past that we do not think should be provided centrally... (c) school meals (primary/special; secondary is already delegated)..."

⁶⁶ The factors by which local authorities are now allowed to allocate money to schools are: basic pupil entitlement; deprivation; looked after children; low cost, high incidence special educational needs; the notional SEN budget; English as an additional language; lump sum; split-sites, rates and private finance initiatives; exceptional premises factors; rural sparsity.

⁶⁷ This was added to the other factors in June 2013. Councils can allocate funds if:

- the primary school is smaller than 150 pupils, *and*
- for all the pupils for whom this school is their nearest, the average distance they would have to travel to their next nearest school is greater than 2 miles.

⁶⁸ Authorities that kept over 50% of funding with the council: City of London, Westminster, Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Newham, Coventry, Liverpool, St Helens, Bury, Bath and North East Somerset, City of Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Derbyshire, Wokingham, Warrington, Plymouth, Blackpool, Shropshire, Cornwall, Gloucestershire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire (Source: DfE analysis of Section 251 returns for 2012-13 from local authorities).

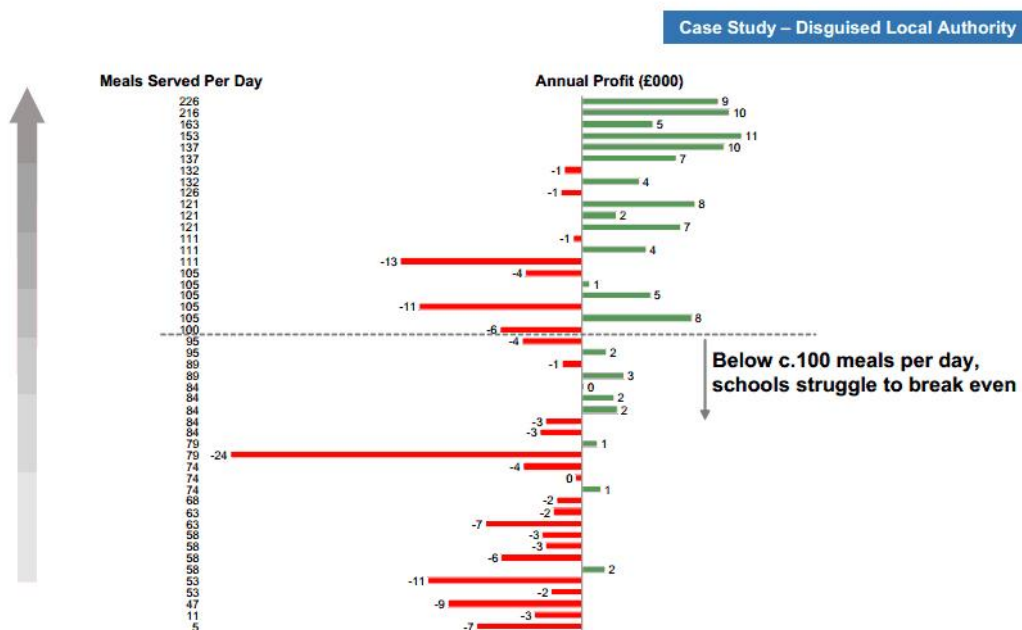
food; £103,000 in fees from schools for setting out dining furniture (something a lot of schools do themselves); £820,000 of FSM money that the council gave him as part of the pooled funding agreement; and £215,000 from an annual charge he makes to schools to deliver the service (equivalent to the old school lunch grant of £10.17 per pupil per year).

Against this revenue, he had costs in schools of £4.1 million for staff, food costs and school overheads (e.g. cleaning chemicals, training, marketing and repairs). This left him with a surplus of £492,000, from which he covered his central overheads, including management and payroll. He broke even over the year.

But a closer look at the numbers shows that Gerry's £492,000 surplus was actually made up of many of individual surpluses and deficits. The schools where Gerry served few children lost money; the ones where he served many children made money. Some of them made a lot of money: Gerry's most profitable school made over £40,000 last year. He had three that made over £20,000, 19 that made over £10,000, and seven that lost money.

The situation in Havering is typical of most local authorities. The chart below shows the mixture of surpluses and deficits in schools in another council we visited (here, roughly half of the schools run a deficit, although these losses are quite low).

Figure 11: Surpluses and deficits in an unnamed local authority



In the past – when the money for school food was pooled and managed by the council – many schools had no idea whether their food service made a profit or loss. They didn't need to know: the local authority caterers took care of all that.

But as of this year, under delegated funding, *all* schools are responsible for managing their own food budgets. Some – usually larger schools – will now

discover that they make a profit. They may be tempted to maximise that profit by taking their business away from the local authority and tendering it to the cheapest bidder. Smaller schools, or those with low take-up, may find they make a loss – and for the first time, they will have to make up the shortfall themselves.

Ultimately, the way to do this is to increase take-up. Delegated funding should act as a powerful incentive for schools to improve their school service. But as we know, that can take a while. So in the meantime, what does delegated funding mean for councils like Havering?

This year, Gerry has managed to persuade his primary schools to pool their money as before (this is an altruistic gesture on the part of the bigger schools, since their profits will be used to subsidise the smaller schools).

However, it won't be long before private caterers begin to compete for Gerry's larger primary schools. Because they don't have to subsidise the small schools, good private caterers can keep the profits they make from running successful lunch services. This means they can offer better terms to the customers they want. Some private caterers even offer schools a lump sum of cash in return for a catering contract, knowing they can still make a tidy profit. Large schools also have the option of bringing the catering in-house, thereby keeping all the profits.

To see off a private competitor, Gerry has to undercut them on price. He has already done this successfully with several of his secondary schools. However, each time this happens it whittles away at the money that he uses to subsidise the loss-making schools.

There will come a point where he can no longer keep small schools afloat. Eventually he will have only one option: charge them what it actually costs to serve them.

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Across the country, schools, councils and catering managers like Gerry are trying to find ways to deal with this. Many have put in place a voluntary pooling agreement, similar to Gerry's, to tide them over in the short term. Some councils are providing temporary extra funding to give schools some breathing space. Others have decided to present schools with the true costs of their food services.

How significant is this issue? There are around 3,800 primary schools in England with fewer than 150 pupils – meaning that they need to get take-up to almost 70% before they can feed enough children to break even. We estimate that there are a further 4,000-or-so larger schools that are currently struggling to break even because of low take-up. So this brings us to a total of around 7,800 schools that aren't feeding enough children to make a profit. Of these, around 1,500 schools are only now switching to a system of delegated funding. Between them these schools educate 6% of our primary school children.

The losses made by primary school food services are typically quite small – under £5,000 per school – and we know from our head teachers' survey that almost all heads believe the school lunch service is important. Most primary schools are

already operating under delegated funding, and have found a way to make up the shortfall. We have faith that the rest will do so too.

Indeed, we believe the delegated funding changes are essentially a good thing. Caterers have told us again and again that the biggest difficulty they face in improving take-up is a lack of engagement from the head teacher. This was understandable when the council took care of every aspect of school meals, from baking to budgeting. School food didn't feel like the school's responsibility.

Delegated funding puts head teachers in control. For those whose school food accounts don't stack up, it will mean having to work more closely with their caterers to increase take-up. No head teacher wants to close their kitchen, or run it at a loss. Delegated funding will also make it easier for schools to go it alone if they have a particular passion for food.

But for some schools the transition to delegated funding will be unavoidably bumpy, and even perilous. We strongly advise loss-making schools to contact organisations such as the Children's Food Trust and Food for Life Partnership to benefit from the funding the government is providing to increase take-up (see Chapter Four). Below are two other measures that we believe could smooth their way.

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ACTION:

Establish small schools taskforce

caterers, kitchen designers and manufacturers working together to provide good food for small schools

Small schools who serve less than a hundred meals a day seldom break even, because of the fixed costs of catering in each school. One way to ease this problem is to band together with other schools to buy in bulk, thereby benefiting from economies of scale. Some food, such as curries or cottage pie, can be made in advance in large industrial kitchens and then reheated in the school, without any reduction in quality or taste.

To help small schools crack this problem, we have launched a public-private alliance: the Small Schools Pilot. Run by LACA, CEDA, Brakes, Annabel Karmel and others, it will work with around 30 schools in a rural area to develop a model of group purchasing that will deliver tasty, nutritious food to children in small schools, and that will enable those schools to break even.

The team will bear in mind the food hygiene requirements in each small school and also the commonly shared ideal of cooking from scratch.

Responsibility: Henry and John

ACTION:

Ensure small schools are fairly funded

We know that even with an optimised, efficient service, and even with 70% take-up, some of the smallest schools may still need help to keep their kitchens open. The new funding formula for 2014-15 gives local authorities the power to give extra funding to small rural schools – but we don't think many schools or local authorities appreciate yet just how important this is. So we will:

- Write to all councils, to let them know what we think would be an appropriate amount of funding for food services in these schools. We will also be writing to small schools to let them know this change is in place.
- Invite schools and caterers to apply for funding to improve their take-up (potentially working alongside bodies such as the Food for Life Partnership and the Children's Food Trust). Get in touch through our website if you would like to apply.

As we have said, we do not think there is a large risk of a mass closure of school lunch services. However, even one closure is bad news. The Secretary of State has therefore agreed to write to all head teachers making it clear that help is at hand.

Responsibility: Henry and John

Responsibility for Secretary of State letter: DfE

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Creative approaches from small schools

Cambo First School

Cambo First School is a tiny primary school near Morpeth in Northumberland which educates village children between the ages of 4 and 9. The school has only two classes, of mixed ages, with a total of 39 pupils. It may be small, but it is a very good school: at its last Ofsted inspection it was deemed 'outstanding'.

The food is also excellent. Dawn, the school cook, cooks everything on site from fresh every day. She uses organic pork reared in the school grounds and vegetables from the school's large allotment. And, perhaps most impressive of all, the service breaks even. How is that possible?

First, says head teacher Paula Cummings, "I make it clear to the parents that if the number of children taking school lunches drops I will be forced to close the service. They are very supportive."

But even with take-up at 100% – which it currently is – Dawn is still only serving 39 children, and charging them a relatively low £2.00 per meal. Many schools struggle to break even when serving 100 children at this price. To understand how

Dawn does it, we took a good look at her accounts – and in particular, her cost per meal.

Her labour costs, at £1.36 per meal, are higher than the £1.00 or so common at bigger schools – but amazingly low considering how small the service is. Dawn is a fast worker – she produces nine meals an hour, which is above the number achieved by the average (much larger) kitchen. She also runs a tight ship. “I have never known her to be off sick,” says Paula. “If she is struggling on a particular day we will all help – even as head teacher I am quite happy to go and wash the dishes.”

Dawn’s food costs are even more impressive: despite the high-quality ingredients, the cost of food per meal is only 54p (which includes the feed for the pigs). A typical figure would be closer to 80p. “We rely on a lot of good will for our food costs,” says Paula. “We buy the feed for the pigs, but a farmer who is a parent takes them to the abattoir, and the abattoir butchers them for free. The seeds for the allotment are donated by the community and we regularly get parents in to help with the work. We also have a begging bowl for ingredients. If parents – either farmers or parents who grow food – have a surplus they will give it to us.”

Overheads are also very low, at 10p a meal. A typical school might have overheads of 20p per meal – covering utilities, kitchen repairs, costs, training and admin. Again, Paula keeps costs down by pulling in favours (and budgeting a little less for repairs than might be prudent).

What Paula, Dawn and the team at Cambo have achieved is extraordinary. They manage to break even serving just 39 meals a day – well below our benchmark of 100. But they do rely on enormous amounts of good will and favours from locals. It would be hard to replicate their methods outside a very tight-knit farming community. “We all support each other,” says Paula. “If you don’t, you will struggle.”

Mickley First School

Mickley First School in rural Northumberland is a small primary school of 63 children with a nursery class of up to 24. The school had a catering contract with the local authority until head teacher Andy Hudson arrived 2½ years ago. An accountant and information analyst before he became a teacher, Andy wanted to get the school lunch service breaking even. That meant increasing take-up from 27 to at least 40.

The school’s cook, Dot Glaister, was officially employed by the local authority. Hugely experienced and much loved, she had been cooking at Mickley First for two decades when Andy asked her to help him bring the service in-house. He put her on to the school’s payroll and hired the school caretaker for an extra hour a day to be her kitchen assistant.

Dot loves having more autonomy. The local authority used to tell her what to do without discussion. They always went for the cheapest option, whether or not it was the best, and she was on a strict budget of 56p per child per meal for ingredients. Dot now has a budget of 70p per child, with the flexibility to spend more some days and less on others – as long as she balances the books over the whole year. Her overall budget is £17,000 a year: £10,000 goes on staff costs, £5,000 on ingredients, £1,000 on cooking costs such as electricity, and £120 on unpredictable extras.

By teaming up with six other schools in the area to buy in bulk, Dot has managed to get a good discount from her food supplier. She consults the children about what they would like to eat, and her long experience means that she provides the right amount of each choice so that wastage is kept to a minimum. Redecorating the dining room, getting children growing vegetables for the kitchen and giving them more say about what goes on the menu – all these measures have helped boost take-up to between 40 and 50 children a week. The service now breaks even.

A number of larger schools in the area have brought their food in-house like Mickley First, and made a success of it. What makes Mickley unusual is that it can break even despite its size. Andy Hudson says this is down to canny budgeting, high take-up and Dot’s experience and popularity. “A school cook who likes children matters.”

Crich Junior School

Crich Junior School, in rural Derbyshire, has just 50 pupils and – because of tight planning regulations for its Victorian building – no kitchen. Instead, it gets its lunches delivered every day from a primary school in Fritchley, a mile down the hill.

The relationship with Fritchley’s cook, Bernie, is crucial. Before she began cooking for Crich, Bernie visited the school several times to talk to the children about their likes and dislikes, and helped smooth out any glitches in the system for delivering, reheating and serving the food. “Every request has been willingly tried out,” says head teacher Cheryl Julian. Lunch costs a very reasonable £1.90. In the past, Derbyshire County Council managed the food budget from a central pot. Now that the funding has been devolved, Cheryl and Bernie are having to balance the books themselves. But by collaborating with Fritchley – and running a tight ship themselves – they are managing to break even.

Despite its small size, Crich runs a popular, efficient and healthy lunch service. It also has an impressive growing scheme – including a 30-foot polytunnel and a chicken coop – and has become a ‘flagship’ school in the Food for Life Partnership. The school was recently deemed ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted.

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Chapter Ten: Hunger and Food Poverty

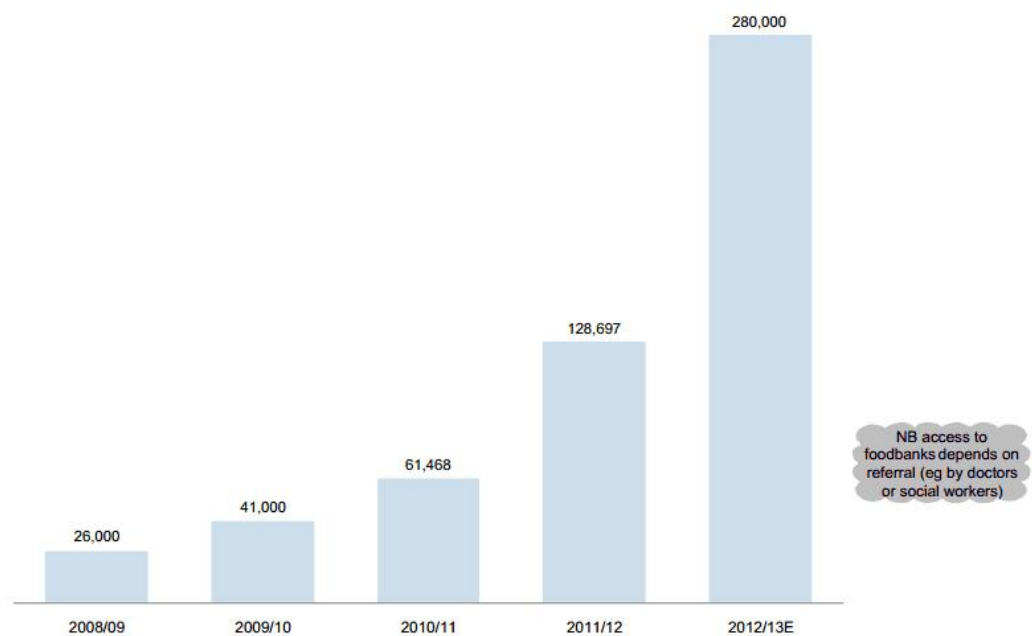
In which we learn that there are children coming to school without eating breakfast, and others who are skimping on lunch; and we welcome government funding to establish breakfast clubs in schools, and its promise to re-examine the criteria for free school meals entitlement.

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We haven't just been eating *lunch* in schools lately. We have had quite a few breakfasts too. An increasing number of schools now have breakfast clubs, serving children whose parents start work early, as well as those who might otherwise start the day on an empty stomach.

It is clear that some children are not getting fed adequately at home. These children come from poor – and often chaotic – families. Getting accurate figures on the scale and severity of this problem is not easy. We know that the number of people served by food banks has doubled every year since 2008-09. And we have been given data by breakfast club providers showing that applications for school breakfast clubs have trebled in the past three years.

Figure 12: Number of people served by food banks⁶⁹



Some people argue that the popularity of breakfast clubs merely reflects the need for cheap childcare, and a general trend towards longer school days. It can also be argued that more people are using food banks simply because more food banks have been set up, and copious media coverage has made everyone aware of their existence.

⁶⁹ Trussell Trust (August 2012). NB although the 2012-13 value is an estimate, 260,000 people had already been served when it was calculated.

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Children are currently entitled to receive a free school meal if their parents are entitled to receive one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Income Based Jobseekers Allowance
- An income-related employment and support allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit, provided you are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual income (as assessed by HM Revenue & Customs) that does not exceed £16,190
- Universal Credit (during the Universal Credit pathfinder which starts on 29 April, children in families in receipt of Universal Credit will be entitled to FSM)

If the parent qualifies for Working Tax Credit Run-on (the payment someone receives for a further four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit) then they are still entitled to free school meals during that period. This also applies if they start to work fewer than 16 hours per week.

Children who receive Income Support or income-based Job Seeker's Allowance in their own right also qualify.

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What we know for certain is that in 2012, the poorest 10% of households spent 23.8% of their income on food, compared with 4.2% for the richest households. But these figures also suggest, perhaps surprisingly, that the situation is not getting significantly worse (the 23.8% for 2012 compares to 23.3% in 2007).

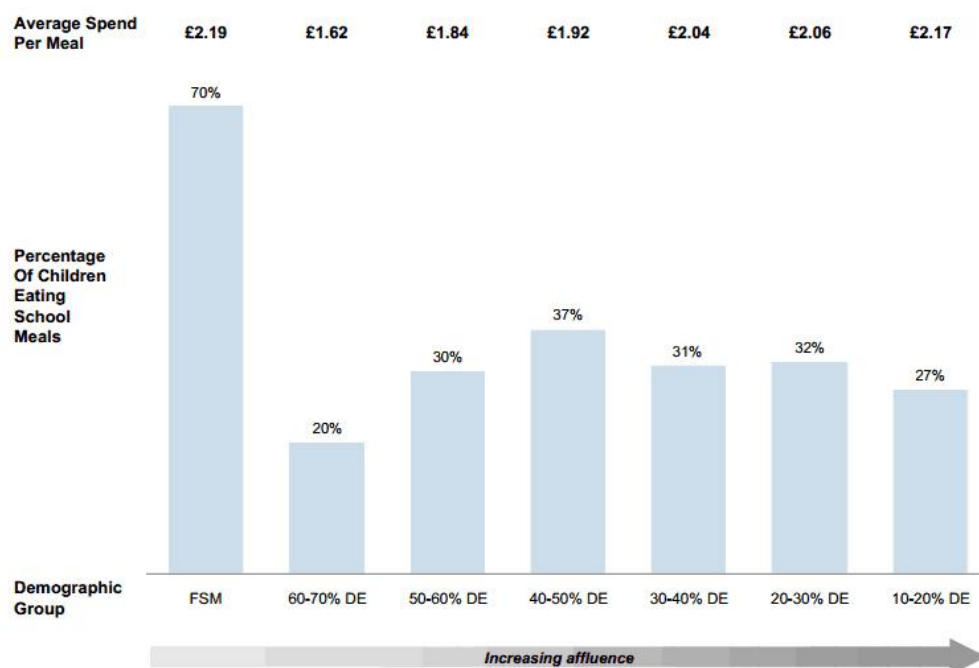
Whatever the underlying trend, there are undoubtedly families whose food budgets are stretched, as well as some that are too dysfunctional to feed their children well.

An analysis of the available data by the Children's Society shows that there are 700,000 children of school age who are not eligible for free school meals, but whose family income (after they have paid their rent) is less than £10 per head per day. Clearly, paying for school lunches would take up a substantial proportion of this.

We analysed what 15,000 children – from a wide variety of schools, regions and backgrounds – actually spend on lunch, and what they eat (using data provided to us by ParentPay, a company that runs electronic payment systems in schools).

The chart below shows the percentage of children who eat school meals, according to the prosperity of the area they live in (i.e. what percentage of people in their post code belong to the lowest socio-economic groups D and E). The figures at the top show the average spend of each group on a meal.

Figure 13: Average spend per meal and percentage of children eating school meals, by level of affluence⁷⁰



It reveals that whereas most of the children who are entitled to free school meals eat a school lunch, that falls to 20% among those children who live in the poorest postcodes but have parents in work (ie. who are not eligible for a free meal). The best-case scenario is that these children are bringing in a packed lunch, but these are often of very poor quality. And we know that some children are not eating lunch at all.

In addition, those children from the poorest areas who do buy food at school spend an average of just £1.62 a day (compared to a typical spend of over £2). This is an average figure: some of these families are deciding to spend their money on a school meal, but others are just buying snacks.

With the introduction of Universal Credit, the way in which FSM entitlement is assessed will be changed, as the benefits to which it is linked will no longer exist. The Government has already confirmed that it will not replace the FSM benefit with a cash payment to the family (as had been widely rumoured), but it is still determining how entitlement should be assessed.

In addition to the problem of children from more disadvantaged homes not getting a proper lunch there are children arriving at school without having eaten breakfast. Teacher surveys suggest this is linked to poor parenting as much as poverty – but whatever the cause, children who are hungry can't concentrate.

Scientific research (supported by masses of anecdotal evidence) shows that hunger impairs thinking, and that behavioural, emotional and academic problems are more prevalent among hungry children (see Appendix C). For example, a 2012 study of nearly 1,400 6-16 year olds showed that those who had eaten breakfast

⁷⁰ Source: ParentPay data, OC&C analysis

performed at least twice as well on six measures of cognitive function as those who had not⁷¹.

Children who can't concentrate can't learn, and are more likely to disrupt the class. A good breakfast sets them up for half the school day – often the half in which the most difficult lessons are scheduled. Without breakfast, the academic performance of already disadvantaged children suffers.

There are health considerations, too. Skipping breakfast leads to poorer overall eating habits and is a recognised contributor to childhood obesity. Research carried out this year in eight European countries found that children aged 10-12 who skipped breakfast were 80% more likely to be obese⁷².

For both philanthropic and practical reasons, then, it is in the interests of many schools to set up a breakfast club (or provide breakfast during the first lesson or with a “booster” class). The unmet need in the most deprived schools remains great. There are 1,959 schools with 40% or more of their pupils eligible for FSM. The charity Magic Breakfast is currently helping to run breakfast clubs in around 230 of these schools, providing food and practical support, and has a further 140 on its waiting list.

There are, broadly-speaking, two models for breakfast clubs – those where breakfast is given free to any child who wants it, and those where better-off parents pay for their children's breakfast. Both models have their advantages.

The free model – used by Magic Breakfast – avoids the stigma associated with being singled out as a FSM child. It also means that breakfast is provided to children in low-income working families who are often just above the FSM threshold. These clubs usually rely heavily on local volunteers and alternative sources of subsidy to help them stay afloat without state funding.

The paying model has the advantage that a well-run club with good take-up can become financially self-sufficient. Breakfast clubs are not just popular with the poorest families: they provide a useful form of childcare for all working parents, many of whom can easily afford to pay.

⁷¹ Wesnes KA et al *Appetite* 2012 Dec (reported by Dr Michael Nelson of the Children's Food Trust)

⁷² Bjørnaraå HB et al *Public Health Nutr.* 2013 Mar 11:1-9

ACTION:

Set up financially self-sufficient breakfast clubs

increase healthy breakfast provision for children who are arriving at school hungry

We believe that all schools with FSM entitlement greater than 40% should set up breakfast clubs, and that they can do so without relying on ongoing state subsidy.

To help them get started, the Department for Education will offer contracts to catering companies, charities or voluntary organisations to work closely with schools over a two-year period. Their task will be to set up breakfast clubs that will no longer require a state subsidy after two years – either because they have adopted a paying model or because they have created a model that supports itself through local volunteers or non-state subsidies.

During this two-year period – while they are creating the self-sufficient model – these providers may also provide direct food subsidies to the clubs.

The providers will work with schools to help head teachers assess their specific needs, to identify the arrangements that will have the most impact, and to develop and implement a plan to maintain self-funded clubs beyond August 2015.

Costs

The DfE will provide funds of £3.15 million over two years (including evaluation costs). Those providers that win the contracts will have to match this funding – bringing the total investment to around £6 million.

The funding will be directed to the poorest schools – those with 40% or more FSM entitlement. The cost of establishing a breakfast club in an average school is £6,000 per year, which covers both food (serving average of 50 children) and professional expertise. The £6 million would therefore allow the establishment of clubs in 500 schools over two years.

We will review the progress of all new breakfast clubs at the end of year one, to ensure they are on the way to financial sustainability.

Implementation

Applicants to help set up breakfast clubs will be expected to demonstrate a track record of successful delivery. They will need to show that they have the capacity to deliver the necessary volume of breakfasts. They will also have to show how they intend to bring in the necessary funding to match the initial seed fund.

The tender process will be held shortly after the School Food Plan launch. It is anticipated that the successful applicants will begin working with schools from Autumn 2013.

Responsibility: Department for Education

ACTION:

Investigate the case for extending free school meal entitlement

We know that the price of school meals is an issue for many low-income families (especially those with more than one child). Some parents simply cannot afford to buy school meals for all their children. The Education Secretary agrees with us that this issue needs addressing.

The government has agreed to investigate the case for extending free school meal entitlement.

Responsibility: Department for Education

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Chapter Eleven: An assessment of universal free school meals

In which we learn why some countries – and some English councils – offer free school meals to all children; we consider the costs and benefits of this approach; and we recommend that the government should introduce universal free school meals in all primary schools.

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Thirty years ago, Finland was one of the world's unhealthiest nations. Diet was poor and rates of smoking were astronomical. “In the 1970s, we held the world record for heart disease,” says Pekka Puska, director of the National Institute of Public Health in Helsinki.⁷³

Then in his mid-twenties, and freshly graduated from medical school, Puska believed this epidemic of ill health had to be tackled at its cultural roots. In 1972, he started an experimental project in the eastern region of Finland, the Province of North Karelia, where one in ten working age men and women were on disability benefit due to diseased arteries.

Puska’s most important insight was that educating people isn’t enough to change their behaviour: you need to make it easy for them. “The whole environment had to change,” Puska told us when we spoke to him. “The food industry, restaurants, cafeterias, supermarkets. We had to make sure that the healthy choices became the easy choices.”

Puska and his team set up lots of different initiatives, all designed to nudge people toward healthy behaviour. They cleared paths and gave free tractioned shoe clamps to the elderly so they could walk in winter; they increased the number of bike paths and created safe, well-lit cross-country ski paths; they worked with local food industries, including sausage manufacturers, to reduce fat and salt levels; they even created a X-Factor-style TV show where Finns competed to see who was healthiest. It was a huge hit, with over a quarter of the male population tuning in.

Within five years, risk factors and deaths from heart disease started to fall dramatically. Puska was asked to roll his project out across the country. By 2009 the annual mortality rate from heart disease in men had fallen by 85% in North Karelia – and by 80% across the whole of Finland. Average life expectancy has risen by seven years for men and six years for women.

But the Finns didn’t just get ‘nudged’ onto a healthier path. The Finnish government was not afraid to intervene on a grand scale – most notably, by improving the diets of school children. Puska was able to do this because, since the War, Finland has provided free school meals to every pupil.

“The free school meal was essential. If we were to change our national diet, it was critical that this started in schools,” says Puska. “All of the evidence shows that a childhood habit for healthy eating is likely to stay with you for life.”

Finland now spends 8% of its total education budget on high-quality school food⁷⁴. This has piqued the curiosity of other countries, including Britain. In autumn 2009, the Labour government decided to run free school meal pilots in three boroughs in this country – Durham, Newham, and Wolverhampton – to see what impact they might have⁷⁵.

In Durham and Newham all children in primary schools became eligible for free school meals. In Wolverhampton they extended the entitlement to an extra 15% of children in both primary and secondary schools. In total, 90,000 children were made newly eligible for free school meals, at a cost of £28 million, which was

⁷³ School Food Plan Interview with Prof Pekka Puska.

⁷⁴ Finnish National Board of Education: *School Meals in Finland, Investment in learning*

⁷⁵ Previously, Hull council ran its own three year trial starting in 2004.

funded jointly by the Department of Health and the Department for Education. The trials ran until the summer of 2011.

At the same time, Islington Council decided to run its own pilot project, funding universal free school meals across all of its primary schools.

* * *

The ambitions for the universal free school meal programme in England were broader than those in Finland, where the primary purpose is to provide “a pedagogical tool to teach good nutrition and eating habits⁷⁶. In England the stated objective was to gather data showing whether universal free school meals would not only improve the children’s diet and health, but also their behaviour, attendance and academic performance⁷⁷.

In Newham and Durham the results were significant. Take-up of school meals rose from just under 50% in both areas to 72% for Newham (it is now 87% as part of a continuation of the pilot) and 85% for Durham. As you would expect, more children ate vegetables at lunch (up by 23%) and there was a steep decline in consumption of the items associated with packed lunches: sandwiches fell by 27%, soft drinks by 16% and crisps by 18%.

Academically, the benefits were clear. Students in the pilot areas were on average two months ahead of their peers elsewhere. Between 3% and 5% more children reached the target levels in maths and English at key stage 1. Across both pilot areas, 4% more children achieved the expected levels in English at key stage 2. This is a bigger improvement than the 3.6% boost that followed the introduction of a compulsory ‘literacy hour’ in 1998. Furthermore, these improvements were most marked among children from less affluent families.

There were hidden benefits, too – harder to quantify but felt strongly within the schools that took part. Many teachers told us that the UFSM project had helped to foster a sense of cohesion within their school. “We don’t charge richer parents separately for lessons, or books, or drama,” said one teacher in Islington. “Why is it acceptable to charge for the food?”

Every head teacher we met was impressed by the results of the project. “Our children did better in exams,” one told us. “At the same time, the culture in the school improved in subtle but important ways. It’s been great to avoid the old them-and-us divisions of the packed lunch kids going off to eat separately from the school lunch children.” Another put it simply: “It makes the school a better place.” There were logistical problems to be overcome. Kitchen staff had to adjust to preparing more meals than any of them could remember. Many schools had to change the way they served the food to manage queues that were suddenly twice as long. Even apparently simple things, such as finding space to store the extra food, took time to resolve.

⁷⁶ Finnish National Board of Education, *School Meals in Finland, Investment in learning*

⁷⁷ Kitchen et al, *Evaluation of the free school meals Pilot: Impact Report*, DFE-RR227, 2010

Alison Young⁷⁸ was responsible for leading the project in Durham. It wasn't easy, she concedes, but they always found a way around the problems. "Many people feel that schools today cannot cope logistically with higher take-up," she says. "It's not true. We showed that the kitchens, dining halls and teams can deliver 85% take-up, and probably more. It just wouldn't have been successful without the heads on board – for example, them allowing longer for lunch breaks so we could get everyone through."

Universal free school meals have proved hugely popular in the schools that have tried them. Islington council continues to offer them to all primary school children, as does Newham. Both councils decided to fund the meals itself once the government pilot was terminated (take-up in Newham is now 86%, or 90% when you take into account absences. In Islington, take-up rates reached 82%). Durham council could not find the money and the pilots have now ended.

* * *

Not everyone, however, is convinced of the merits of universal free school meals. Leaving aside, for a moment, the problem of cost, there are three main arguments against rolling out UFSM throughout England.

1. Any future government wanting to make savings might be tempted to end UFSM. This might lead to a mass exodus from school dining halls, bringing the service to its knees financially.

We are not convinced of this. The pilot project in Durham had the opposite effect: once children were accustomed to eating school meals, they continued to do so even when they had to pay. Take-up across Durham is now 65%, compared to 50% before the trial.

2. The quality of food served would decline. Offering meals for free removes the imperative to please the 'customer'. Because parents and children are not paying for the food, the providers will not listen to them and will cut corners to suit themselves.

Again, the pilots show that this is not the case. Parents in the pilot areas were more likely to describe their children's school meals as healthy and high-quality. They were more likely to think that a school meal is healthier than a packed lunch. Interestingly, they were also more likely to say that their child is willing to try new food⁷⁹. In our own visits to Durham and Newham we saw first-hand how much the children love the food being made for them.

⁷⁸ Lead for Health and Wellbeing, Durham County Council.

⁷⁹ It is worth noting that some people believe adopting universal free school meals would mean, effectively, a nationalisation of the school meal system. This is not the case. The Durham and Islington programmes were both delivered by private caterers – Taylor Shaw and Caterlink respectively. There is no reason why they couldn't have made their food in-house, if they had preferred.

At Sheringham Primary School in Newham, we met Florence, an inspiring school chef who takes as much pride in making tasty, top-quality food as any restaurant chef we know. We ate Florence's tandoori chicken, perfectly flavoured rice, lentil dhal and a beautiful cabbage salad. It was easy to see why all the teachers choose to eat her food, for which she charges them £2.35 a day. We sat with a table of year 6 children. "Go and tell the world that Sheringham school lunches are the best," one said. As we left, one of the lunchtime supervisors told us: "Make sure people know what a difference free lunches have made to the children."

3. It is not right that the children of better-off parents should get their school meals for free.

We have heard this argument made as a point of principle. We do not accept it. If you applied this reasoning across the board, you would need to dismantle the state school system and, indeed, the NHS. If there is a net benefit to children and the country as a result of universal free school meals, it should not matter if children from wealthier families get fed well too.

* * *

In our view, then, universal free school meals are a good thing. But at what cost?

The government estimates that providing free school meals to children currently costs around £428 million per year. Before we started this work, it was estimated by the Department for Education that expanding this to all school children in England would cost an additional £2 billion, bringing the annual total to £2.4 billion. However this estimate did not take into account the economies of scale that come with increased take-up, as discussed in Chapter Three.

Taking this into account, we estimate that offering free school meals to all children would cost an additional £1.5 billion bringing the annual total to £1.9 billion. Clearly this is still a huge number. It represents 3.3% of the total education budget of £57.2 billion – equivalent to 1.8% of the total NHS budget.

To make the case that this is a sensible use of taxpayers' money, we need to show that it would benefit the nation more than any number of other worthy causes. This isn't easy, not least because there are very few initiatives that bear direct comparison.

The Department for Education made a game attempt, in its official evaluation of the free school meals pilots⁸⁰ to evaluate how much 'bang per buck' UFSM delivered. It compared the costs of the pilots, and the resulting academic improvements, to three other initiatives:

- The Jamie Oliver 'Feed me Better Campaign'. This started in Greenwich in 2004. Jamie Oliver obtained permission from the local authorities to improve the food served in schools. His attempts to do so were filmed for the Channel 4

⁸⁰ *Evaluation of the free school meals Pilot*, DFE-RR227

documentary *Jamie's School Food*.

- Literacy Hour. A minutely-structured daily lesson in the English language for primary school children, first introduced in a small group of local authorities in 1996, before being rolled out in nationwide in 1998.
- Every Child a Reader. This scheme was piloted in a selection of schools in 2010. It was designed to improve the literacy of children who were struggling during the early years of primary school. Its central idea was to provide these children with one-to-one coaching for up to 20 weeks.

For each initiative, the DfE calculated the cost per pupil of each 1% improvement in literacy. At key stage 1, the cost for the UFSM pilots was £235 for each percentage point – more effective than Every Child a Reader, which cost £295 for the same increase. But Every Child a Reader was known to be an expensive intervention, so that isn't much of an endorsement for UFSM. And the other two initiatives did not apply to children at key stage 1, so no comparisons could be drawn.

At key stage 2, UFSM had a significant impact on literacy levels – but the cost per percentage point of improvement, at £112, compared poorly with the Jamie Oliver campaign (£16) and Literacy Hour (£14). However, the authors of the evaluation note that the impact of the Jamie Oliver campaign might have been down to more than the food. The excitement of having a famous chef – and accompanying TV cameras – roaming the schools of Greenwich almost certainly reduced absenteeism and improved behaviour.

We would also point out that the academic benefits of UFSM are broader than those of, say, Literacy Hour. Eating well improves performance in all academic subjects, and a busy, popular dining hall brings intangible benefits to the culture of the school.

Plus, of course, these assessments are based on purely on academic impact. They take no account of the positive impact on children's health, the unifying social effect of having the whole school eating together, or the many other pleasures that come from eating good food in company.

RECOMMENDATION

Government should embark upon a phased roll out of free school meals for all children in all primary schools, beginning with the local authorities with the highest percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals.

We believe that there is enough evidence – both from abroad and from English schools – to justify the partial introduction of universal free school meals. We are recommending that the government should embark on a phased roll-out of free school meals in all primary schools across the country.⁸¹

Our focus is on primary schools because UFSM trials have already been successful here, and because it is far easier to implement in schools that offer a set meal, as most primary schools do. (Introducing universal free school meals into secondary schools would require a considerable reworking of the usual cafeteria-style service, where children have much more choice. This would require further trials).

The phased introduction would start with schools in the local authorities where the highest percentages of children were eligible for free school meals.

The cost of this programme would be substantial. The following table shows the cost of a staged roll-out of free school meals starting with the highest FSM authorities. It assumes that 85% of children not taking up free school meals at the moment (i.e. those currently not eligible and those currently eligible but not taking it up) would take up the additional free school meals. Given the take-up of free school meals, this gives an overall take-up of 88%, or around 92% adjusted for absences. This is in line with the current take-up in the extended free school meal pilot in Newham. It also assumes that, given the economies of scale, the average cost of a meal in primary schools will be £1.76.

⁸¹ People in the sector have suggested many different approaches to introducing universal free school meals. The government could, for instance, offer free school meals to all children in the first term or first year of school. This would give them the healthiest start possible, at a critical period of their development. Alternatively, the government could offer a subsidy to children not eligible for free school meals, to encourage them to choose school meals rather than packed lunches. We believe offering them to all children is the approach that not only has the greatest cultural impact on schools, but has also been clearly shown to work. Nevertheless, we have calculated the costs of all these various initiatives, and put them on our website.

	Average FSM percentage	Number of authorities	Additional # children eating for free (thousands)	Additional Funding Required (£ million)
Tranche 1	28.7%	45	647	185
Tranche 2	19.0%	45	732	224
Tranche 3	14.2%	27	765	241
Tranche 4	10.3%	35	820	262
Total	19.0%	152	2,964	912

recommendation in this plan that the government has not agreed to implement immediately. We hope that, at the very least, the subject will be further debated across government departments and by people working in the field. We would also strongly encourage councils to follow the lead of Islington and Newham and consider funding this themselves.

12

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Chapter Twelve: What gets measured gets done

In which we learn how the government will measure

success.

.....

One thing that we – and our expert panel – all agreed on from the start was that Ofsted should in some way include food in its assessment of schools. However, as we looked more closely into this idea we all saw that it had flaws – the most insurmountable of which is that Ofsted’s inspectors are not food critics.

In order to properly inspect the quality of school dinners we would have to create a parallel workforce which would visit schools solely to taste and analyse the food. This model does exist – in Scotland for example – but we felt that it was not the best way to spend taxpayers’ money⁸².

We are pleased, however, that the Chief Inspector of Schools, Sir Michael Wilshaw, is planning to take positive steps to ensure inspectors are considering diet and the atmosphere of the school canteen each time they visit a school.

* * *

ACTION:

Ofsted inspectors to consider behaviour and culture in the dining hall and the way a school promotes healthy lifestyles

Sir Michael will shortly be announcing revisions to his guidance for inspectors⁸³ which will instruct them to:

- consider how lunch time and the dining space contribute to good behaviour and the culture in the school, including by spending time in the lunch hall;
- ask school leaders how they help to ensure a healthy lifestyle for their children and, specifically, whether their diet has been considered where these are lacking.

We expect this to have a significant impact, because we know that head teachers and their teams often read Ofsted guidance as a way of maintaining readiness to be inspected. We will be working with Ofsted on the final wording of this guidance.

Responsibility: Ofsted

On a national basis, the government has agreed to measure progress regularly, using these five criteria:

1. Take-up of school lunches at primary and secondary schools
2. Nutritional quality of what children eat

⁸² The Scottish approach makes sense given their system. Scotland’s school meals service is completely vertically integrated: a single line of accountability runs from the Scottish Executive through the 12 local authorities down to the schools and their kitchens. There are three health and nutrition inspectors (HNIs), who work collaboratively with local authorities and schools across the country – more coaching than monitoring. The monolithic structure of the system gives the HNIs the networks they need to have an impact, and enables them to maintain relationships with caterers and schools even though they are unlikely to visit any school more than once, ever. England’s more fragmented, openly competitive system is not a natural setting for this type of work.

⁸³ This guidance sits alongside the inspection handbook, and can be found at: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/subsidiary-guidance-supporting-inspection-of-maintained-schools-and-academies>

- percentage of a representative sample of schools meeting food standards
3. Morale of the workforce
 - percentage of a representative sample of catering staff who say they would recommend their job to a friend
 4. Number of schools winning awards from Food for Life Partnership and Children’s Food Trust
 5. Number of 16-year-olds able to cook five savoury dishes
 - percentage of a representative sample

The government has also agreed to assess the effectiveness of the programmes in our ‘flagship boroughs’ (see action 5 and Chapter Five).

This still leaves a gap. Where can parents and children go to celebrate those schools that are serving great food? How are parents to assess the food culture in a school to which they are thinking of sending their child?

We believe the answer to this may be a website where schools can publish what they do and parents can comment on it and rate it.

As our expert panel have pointed out to us forcefully, this approach has many dangers. Head teachers already have their work cut out dealing with bullying and bad behaviour on social media. This could be just another outlet.

But sooner or later, someone will do this. There are already similar ideas springing up, such as ratemyteacher.com (sample comment: “she is a strict mean teacher who always thinks she is right no one in my class likes her. Everyone dreads going to her class!!!!”). Ofsted has its own ‘parent view’ website.

We have had discussions with one of the more successful ratings websites, and we believe that it may be possible to set up a site that allows schools to celebrate what they do well, and to receive criticism, without a descent into trolling. In order to engage parents, this website may need to cover not only food, but also the other areas of school life that are not covered by Ofsted: arts and sports.

It would require a lot of care to get this website right, and the investment required would have entrepreneurial levels of risk attached. We do not believe that the government has these skills, nor do we think it is appropriate to expose charitable funding to these levels of risk.

However, Russell Hobby, head of the National Association of Head Teachers, has suggested to us that this could be something that representatives of schools across the country might want to lead. Rather than waiting to be judged, schools might prefer to set up the mechanism themselves. Brian Lightman, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, also strongly supports this principle. We like this idea and have agreed to discuss it with Russell and Brian in more depth after the publication of this plan.

* * *

ACTION:

Measure success

Set up and monitor our five measures to test whether the School Food Plan is working

To monitor the impact of the School Food Plan, and ensure that progress is being made, the government has agreed to collect data regularly on:

- Take-up of school meals
- Nutritional quality of the food (number of schools meeting the new standards)
- Proportion of sixteen year olds who can cook a repertoire of savoury dishes
- Morale of the workforce
- Proportion of schools with a quality award (for example the Food for Life Partnership award or the Children's Food Trust award)

The government will take base-line measures in 2013.

Responsibility: Department for Education

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.

Appendices

Appendix A: A brief history of school food

1879-1944: Tackling hunger

In 1870, the Education Act made elementary education compulsory for all children. Nine years later, charitable schools in Manchester started serving the first free school meals. The aim was to feed poor children so that they could spend the day studying instead of earning their crust of bread, and to address the problem of children coming to school too hungry to learn. The idea caught on, partly because of widespread concern that Britain's youth were growing up malnourished and dangerously sickly.

The industrial revolution had drawn millions of poor families into the rapidly-expanding cities, where they were cut off from the fresh produce of the countryside. The urban poor often survived on little but bread and tea, and this had a predictable effect on the health of the nation. Throughout the Boer War there was concern over the stunted height and physical weakness of Britain's soldiers.

The Education Act of 1906 established the principle that lunch was an essential part of the school day and authorised local councils to give free meals to children from poor families. By 1914, over 158,000 children were receiving free school meals once a day. The food (largely stodgy 'fuel' such as potatoes and dumplings) was free for those 'needy children' at risk of hunger. Other children paid at least the cost of the ingredients.

While the focus remained on providing food for hungry children, the period following the First World War, especially the 1920s, saw significant cuts in the expenditure of government departments, including Education. By the outbreak of World War II, only 157 authorities (half the total) were providing meals.

During the Second World War, school meals were seen as an important part of the war economy. Nutritional standards for school food were first introduced in 1941, to ensure that children were receiving enough food despite the war-time rationing afflicting their families. These standards set out a minimum of 1,000 calories, and 30g fat per meal (this compares to a maximum of 530 calories and 20g of fat per meal prescribed in the primary school standards today).

1944 – 1949: Universal free school meals

The Education Act of 1944 made it compulsory for local education authorities (LEAs) to provide a free meal for children in state schools. School food was mostly cooked on the premises, but the staff and ingredients were paid for by the council. School meals were described by the Ministry of Education as having 'a vital place in national policy for the nutrition and well-being of children'. Take-up of these universal free school meals hovered around 70%.

Universal free school meals ended in 1949, when the government introduced a flat national charge of 2.5 pence.

1950 – mid 1970s: The institutional school meal

From 1950 until the mid-1970s, there was a high take-up of school meals: around 70%. This was not because the food was especially good. While there were some schools serving tasty food, few remember this period for its gastronomic excellence. But school food was cheap, and – equally important – it was the norm.

Lunch supervision was a compulsory part of a teacher's school day and teachers and children ate together. This ended in 1967 when, after a protracted dispute, teachers won the right to have a break at lunchtime. Ever since, far fewer teachers have sat down to eat with their students.

Mid 1970s – mid 1980s: Dramatic reduction in take-up

From the late 1970s onwards, children began to turn away from school meals in favour of packed lunches prepared in the home (assembled from modern consumer products such as sliced bread, processed meat and mass-produced snacks) and fast food. High street fast food outlets – along with expertly branded crisps and snacks – quickly overtook school food in terms of excitement and appeal.

The price of school meals also increased dramatically, first because of inflation and then because of the removal of national pricing from 1980. Take-up correspondingly declined. This led to a vicious circle of reduced volume and increasing cost, as well as the de-skilling of school chefs.

The 1980 Education Act removed the legal requirement for LEAs to provide a meal for every pupil, abolished minimum nutritional standards (which had first been introduced in 1941) for school meals and tightened entitlement criteria for FSM, formally linking criteria to the benefits system.

The final major decline in take-up happened in 1988, when 500,000 children lost their entitlement for free school meals (as a result of the 1986 Social Security Act). In three years, take-up fell from 50% to 43%.

1988 – 2005: A backdrop of concern and some green shoots of progress

In 1988, the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering required local authorities to put school food contracts out to tender. Many councils bought in school services from private caterers, including fast food operators and industrial food manufacturers. Across the 1990s, school meals became more processed and less nutritious.

There was a gradual build-up of public disquiet over declining standards. The School Meals Campaign, calling for the re-introduction of nutritional standards, was launched in 1992. That same year, the Caroline Walker Trust – a charity promoting 'public health through good food' established the Expert Working Group on Nutritional Guidelines.

Voluntary nutritional guidelines – based on the findings of that group – were produced in 2001, but without a legal mandate these did not have a significant impact.

In 2002 a school cook, Jeanette Orrey, began her fight to improve school food from within the school kitchen. The Food for Life Partnership was born and the interest of one celebrity chef was piqued...

2005: The year of Jamie

In 2005, Jamie Oliver made a four-part documentary series for Channel 4: Jamie's School Dinners. It became one of the most talked about television shows of the decade, and helped to bring about a sea-change in attitudes towards school food and healthy eating.

As a result of the public clamour that followed, Prime Minister Tony Blair promised to take immediate steps to improve the quality of school food. The government set up the School Food Trust, a non-departmental public body charged with helping schools improve their meals (it has since become a charity and changed its name to the Children's Food Trust).

2005 – 2013: The start of a turnaround

Strict – and legally binding – nutrition and food guidelines were introduced for all state schools, and school vending machines were no longer allowed to sell sweets, crisps or fizzy drinks.

The government invested £460 million in improving school food between 2005 and 2011. A further £4 million was provided, via the School Food Trust, to establish a network of 29 regional training centres for school cooks, known as FEASTs – Food Excellence and Skills Training.

The years since 2005 have seen encouraging improvements in both the quality and the take-up of school food, thanks to the work of many head teachers, chefs, local authorities, private caterers, campaigners and charities.

Meanwhile, the structure of the educational establishment is changing. The massive growth in academies – many of which are not legally obliged to abide by the existing food standards – has provoked anxiety that these hard-won gains may be under threat. This was one of the issues we were invited to address when we began our work on this plan in April 2012.

Appendix B: Approach to revising school food standards

Summary

It is important that the food served in schools provides children with the energy and nutrition they need. School food standards serve as a nutritional safety net – one that is especially important for the most vulnerable children, for whom a school lunch may be the most important meal of the day.

As we have outlined, however, the implementation of the current standards has not been universally successful. We believe that it is possible to create a clearer set of food-based standards, accompanied by practical guidance, that:

1. Provides caterers with a framework on which to build interesting, creative and nutritionally-balanced menus.
2. Is less burdensome and operationally cheaper to implement than the current nutrient-based standards.

A group reporting into the DfE will draw up a set of these standards (using the early draft below as a starting point) and test them in schools to confirm that they achieve these objectives.

If this testing is successful, the Secretary of State has agreed to introduce the new standards as mandatory to all types of school: maintained schools and all new academy and free schools⁸⁴.

The approach

There will be four stages to revising standards.

1. The DfE will commission work to test the standards. This will include talking to caterers about how they would interpret these standards, translating them into menus, and revising and enhancing them and supporting guidance as necessary.
2. A set of standards, and the accompanying guidance, will be sent to cooks at a variety of schools (academies and maintained schools; schools that cater in-house; through a private caterer, and through the local authority). These cooks will be asked to create menus based on the new standards, as well as commenting on the flexibility, creativity and cost implications of the new standards versus the existing standards. The DfE will commission work to analyse the nutritional content of the

⁸⁴ As we set out in Chapter 8, all academies that were established prior to 2010 already have clauses in their funding agreement that require them to comply with the national standards for school food. All those that are founded after the publication of this plan will have a similar clause written into their contracts. That still leaves a subsection of academies that were founded between these dates, and had no such clause written into their standards. Rather than introduce cumbersome new legislation to introduce a post-dated clause, we are working with leading academy chains to sign up to the new food standards voluntarily. So far, all the big academy chains that we have spoken to have been eager to do this. They include: E-ACT, Ormiston Academies Trust, Harris Federation, Oasis Community Learning Multi Academy Trust, The School Partnership Trust, United Learning Trust, Academies Enterprise Trust, and the Greenwood Dale Foundation Trust. We are confident that other Academies will follow suit.

menus these cooks produce, and will compare this with the current nutritional framework to assess whether further changes to the standards are needed.

3. Assuming this gets positive results, the DfE will redesign the guidance for primary, secondary and special schools – using a similar simple, clearly-written format for each. In addition, the DfE will use the menus developed in stage 2, and those produced by other organisations to create sample menus which meet the new standards and exhibit the creativity and excellence being shown by the best schools.

4. The DfE will put the new standards out for consultation (the usual period for this being 12 weeks) and, following completion of the consultation, will lay regulations to put the new standards into secondary legislation, replacing the current standards. Subject to the successful passage of this legislation, the DfE will amend its standard contract template so that all future academies and free schools will be required to comply with the new standards.

Governance

The revision of school food standards will be overseen by a group of nutrition experts, including those who have been involved in the School Food Plan expert panel, as well as a head teacher and a caterer. It will be chaired by Henry Dimpleby.

Timing

The goal is to complete the whole process by May 2014 which, subject to parliamentary approval, would mean that the new regulations will apply to schools from the start of the school year beginning in September 2014.

Early Draft of Food Based Standards

This is a very early draft of the new standards (drafted by Dr Susan Jebb of the MRC with input from our panel). They are intended to give an early sense of the direction of travel. They will be refined and tested extensively. They will then be put out for consultation. We would of course welcome any input prior to that.

General Principles:

For children, eating in school should be a pleasurable experience, a time spent sharing good food with peers and teachers. It is the one time in the day when a school comes together in an informal, relaxed environment. It helps set the tone of a school and it helps provide a model for the relationship with food that children will carry outside school.

These standards are intended to ensure that children get the nutrition they need across the whole school day. Compulsory, rather than voluntary, standards are proven to increase take up of fruit and vegetables and foods containing other essential nutrients, such as iron and calcium, while restricting the consumption of fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt.

As a general principle, it is important to provide a wide range of foods. Variety is key – whether it is different fruits and vegetables, grains or types of meat, fish or pulses for example.

Chefs, cooks and caterers should also be aware that these standards relate to the nutritional nature of the food served. It is just as important to make the food look good and taste good; to talk to children about what is on offer and recommend dishes; to reduce queuing; and to serve the food in a pleasant environment where they can eat with their friends.

Wherever possible, foods should be prepared in the school's own kitchen from fresh, locally sourced ingredients.

Food Group	Standard
Fruit and vegetables	<p>At least one portion of fruit and one portion of vegetables or salad should be provided per day per child (further information will be provided on portion sizes, and what counts as a fruit or vegetable alongside this).</p> <p>This can include those provided within other dishes (e.g., fruit-based desserts, or casseroles and stews containing vegetables).</p> <p>A wide variety of fruit and vegetables should be served over the week, e.g., providing different colours and types of fruit and vegetables.</p>
Meat, fish, eggs and other non-dairy sources of protein	<p>A portion of food from this group should be provided on a daily basis as these foods are particularly important providers of iron, zinc and other essential nutrients.</p> <p>Red meat should be provided at least twice per week, and fish at least once a week. Oily fish should be provided at least once every three weeks.</p> <p>Other non-dairy, iron-rich sources of protein, such as eggs, beans, pulses, soya products and nuts and seeds should be provided as a protein option every day for non-meat eaters and at least twice a week for all children.</p> <p>Any bought-in processed meat or chicken products may only be served once per week in primary schools and twice per week in secondary schools across the school day. They</p>

should meet the regulations that brought an end to the Turkey Twizzler (i.e. meet the legal minimum meat content levels set out in the Meat Products (England) Regulations 2003, or other current regulations, and not contain any prohibited offal).

Starchy food

A portion of food from this group should be provided on a daily basis. Provide a variety of starchy food types across the day and the week (for example, bread, potatoes and other starchy root vegetables, pasta, rice and other grains).

Starchy foods that are fried or baked in fat or oil (for example chips, fried rice) should not be available on more than two days in any week. For every day a starchy food fried in fat or oil is provided, a starchy food not fried in fat or oil should also be provided.

Extra bread with no fat or oil added after baking should also be provided on a daily basis.

Milk and dairy food

A portion of food from this group should be available on a daily basis, for example as cheese or yoghurts.

In addition, reduced fat milk for drinking should be available as an option every day.

A dish containing cheese should not be served as the only protein option more than twice each week.

Foods high in fat, salt and sugar

No artificial trans fats should be included in any food. Mono or polyunsaturated oils/fats/spreads should be used wherever possible.

Confectionery⁸⁵, chocolate and chocolate-coated products should not be provided throughout the school day. Provision of cakes, puddings and biscuits should be limited to lunch times.

No more than two portions of deep-fried food (including foods where fat is added in the manufacturing process, for example on potato wedges), foods cooked in batter, breadcrumbs or food containing pastry, should be provided in a single week.

No snacks may be provided outside meal times, except nuts, seeds, fruit⁸⁶ or vegetables with no added salt, sugar or fat. Savoury crackers or breadsticks can only be served with fruit or vegetables or dairy food as part of a school meal.

Drinks

There should be easy access at all times to free, fresh drinking water.

The other drinks that can be provided are:

- Plain water (still or carbonated).

⁸⁵ Including Chocolate, biscuits containing or coated with chocolate, cereal bars, processed fruit bars, sweets

⁸⁶ Dried fruit is permitted to have 0.5% fat as a glazing agent.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reduced fat milk. ● Fruit juice or vegetable juice. ● Plain calcium fortified soya milk ● Plain yoghurt drinks ● Unsweetened combinations of fruit or vegetable juice with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Plain water ○ Reduced fat milk or yoghurt (with or without plain water) ○ Plain calcium fortified soya milk ○ Combinations of reduced fat milk yoghurt or plain calcium fortified soya milk. ● Tea, coffee, hot chocolate <p>All of these drinks should not exceed 5% added sugars/honey and should be available as individual portions not exceeding 300mls (for fruit juice and fruit juice drinks, the individual portion must not exceed 150ml in primary schools and 200 ml in secondary schools).</p>
<p>Salt and condiments</p>	<p>No product should exceed the maximum salt content specified in the prevailing Responsibility Deal salt targets or other target nutrient specifications. Procurement contracts should encourage all suppliers to commit to all relevant Responsibility Deal pledges and to the current Government Buying Standards for Food. <i>[Additional standards relating to the salt content of foods will be developed]</i></p> <p>No salt shall be available to add to food after the cooking process is complete.</p> <p>Condiments may be available only in sachets or individual portions of no more than 10 grams or one teaspoonful.</p>

Appendix C: Why it matters – evidence on health and attainment

If you want to see more of the evidence on how food affects behaviour, attainment and health, you can start with these documents. Much has been thought and written, but we have selected these reports as a good place to start:

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Pollitt E, Cueto S, Jacoby ER, 'Fasting and cognition in well- and undernourished schoolchildren: a review of three experimental studies', *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 67(4):779S-784S, (1998)

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