

# Food in Schools



A short guide  
for parents  
and carers



# Introduction



# What is already happening in schools?

The Government wants to see big changes to food in schools and is working closely with schools and local councils to improve the quality of the food they provide. But we also need your help to make the changes that may be necessary in your child's school. We have therefore produced this guide to tell you about what your child should be eating and drinking at school and what they should be learning about food. It also tells you where you can find more information and suggests questions to ask your child and your school. More importantly, it suggests ways that you could help both at home and at school.



## School meals

In some areas, school meals are provided by the school or by a supplier employed by the school. In others, meals are provided by the local authority or its own central supplier. There are also a number of areas where school meals are not provided at all although a meal of some description must be offered to all children entitled to free school meals.

Where meals are provided, most primary schools offer one or two choices each day. Secondary schools typically offer a wider choice of meals. School lunches can vary in quality from school to school. Any meal however should include starchy food (potatoes, rice and pasta), fruit and vegetables, milk and dairy food and protein (meat, fish and vegetarian alternatives).

## Breakfast clubs

Your child's school may operate a breakfast club. This is a club where children can go before the school day starts and have a breakfast that will give them a good start to their day. As well as breakfast, children can often learn new things and try out different activities.

## What is a healthier breakfast club?

Healthier breakfast clubs provide a good variety of healthier food and drinks. They encourage pupils (and teachers) to eat breakfast and try something new. Eating and chatting together helps the day to start well and some schools also offer activities such as games and quizzes, or designing posters to advertise the club. Breakfast clubs offer a variety of foods and drinks such as breakfast cereals, fruit pots, toast with different toppings, baked beans, low fat yogurt, water, fruit juice and semi skimmed milk. Pupils at one secondary school said they liked going to the breakfast club because it meant they could talk to their friends and it gave them somewhere to go.

*(Source- Food in Schools Toolkit)*



## Other food in schools

In addition, children often need to eat and drink at other times of the day, not just at lunchtime or breakfast time. Some schools place restrictions on some items.

### Water



Easily accessible free fresh drinking water should be available at convenient points throughout the school and in every building. Dispensers should not be located in the toilets. Children should be able to get a drink of water at any time during the school day – many schools allow children to carry water bottles with them.

### Tuck shops



Many schools run a tuck shop during break times. Your school should be able to tell you what is for sale, who runs it and when it is open. Tuck shops should sell healthier food such as fruit, smoothies, sandwiches and pure fruit juice.

### Healthy tuck

Haslingden Primary School decided that only fruit would be eaten at morning playtimes. The school council asked the pupils for their favourite fruits and set them the challenge of finding a name for the tuck shop and held a competition to create a poster to advertise it. 'Tootey Frootey' tuck shop began selling fruit for 10p. The playground became much tidier; most children were seen eating fruit at playtime - helping them on their way to eating 5 pieces of fruit and veg a day. Some children also bring fruit from home.

(Source- Lancashire Healthy Schools Programme [www.lhsp.org.uk](http://www.lhsp.org.uk))



### Vending machines



Many schools have vending machines selling snacks and drinks. Vending machines should be stocked with healthier products such as pure fruit juice, yogurts, milk and fruit.

### Promoting healthier vending

Involving the pupils in choosing the healthier drinks and snacks for the vending machine will help to make it a success. It is also important that catering staff want to make the vending machine work, and will keep it full of the items that pupils like best. There needs to be a good choice of drinks and snacks that are not too expensive. A large secondary school said its first healthy vending machine made £1903 in its first 23 weeks – the bestseller was milkshakes. A second machine was put on another site and together they have significantly reduced counter queuing problems.

(Source- Food in Schools Toolkit)

# Learning about food

Different subjects that your child does at school include learning about food. For example, your child will learn about nutrition, food preparation and production, digestion and cooking.

**Food Technology:** At primary school children learn to use equipment and tools, develop cooking skills and understand the importance of food hygiene. Around 90% of secondary schools offer food technology which also covers healthier eating.

**Science:** Children learn about different types of food, their nutritional composition, the digestive system and the ways different nutrients keep us in good health, along with how diet, exercise, smoking and drugs affect health.

### Personal Social and Health Education

**(PSHE):** Helps children to recognise what they like and dislike, and encourages them to make healthier choices.

**Geography:** Children get an opportunity to learn about the impact our food choices have on the environment and people who make their living from farming or fishing.

**Citizenship:** Children are offered the chance to explore moral and ethical issues such as food and drink advertising and sustainable development.



### What should my child know?

- In infant school (age 5-7), children should learn that food comes from plants and animals, and understand that people must eat a wide variety of foods in order to grow and be healthy;
- In junior school (age 7-11), children should gain a deeper understanding of food, health and hygiene, and be able to cook simple dishes;
- In secondary school (age 11-16), children should develop a more thorough awareness of nutrition, health, food safety and preparation, learn what constitutes a healthy diet and be able to make informed choices about food.



# What is the government doing to improve school food?

Children need a consistent and positive message about food. This means that schools should involve parents and pupils in making a 'whole school food policy'. This "whole school approach" is part of the Healthy Schools Programme which also includes physical activity, personal social and health education, and emotional health and well being. Many schools are already "Healthy Schools" and many more soon will be.

The Government wants to see a major improvement in school food and has announced a number of ways to help schools and local authorities. These include extra money for the next three years to help authorities and schools plan for a better school meals service and new rules about the nutritional standards of school food which would apply to all schools.

## Why is healthy food so important?

- You want your children to have the best possible start in life and be successful in whatever they do – and a healthier, well-balanced diet is a key part of that and may also contribute to improved learning;
- Child obesity levels are still rising; eating and learning about healthier diets at school and at home, as well as being more active, can help tackle this problem;
- Eating a well- balanced diet in childhood can help protect against chronic diseases in later life. This is one of many reasons why it is important, for example, for children to eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day.



These new rules, which we have just issued for consultation, suggest that:

- All food and drink provided throughout the school day should meet specific standards. This means more healthy foods (like fruit, vegetables and bread) will be available while less healthy foods (like confectionery, pre-packaged savoury snacks (such as crisps) and high-sugar or sweetened fizzy drinks) should be banned. Deep fried products (e.g. fried chips) should only be allowed twice a week.
- Schools should aim to provide a hot meal, cooked on-site from fresh, seasonal, local ingredients.
- There should be access to free, fresh, chilled drinking water throughout the school day.
- Pupils should be taught food preparation and practical cooking skills.

If you want to read the full report or to make comments visit:

[www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations)

The Government is also setting up the School Food Trust which will bring together caterers, nutritionists, food interest groups, schools and parents. It will play an important role in taking forward the Government's programme for improving school food by giving independent support and advice to schools and parents on how they can improve the standard of school meals and ensure that school food stays high on the education agenda.

# How can you help?

The best way is first to find out what your child's school could and should be doing by using this guide and other information listed at the end. Then see what is actually happening in your child's school by talking to your child, to other parents and to the school itself.

## Southlands High School, Chorley

A working party, including the kitchen staff, was set up to look at how to change eating habits and educate pupils about the need for a balanced diet. Working with the children, the project became known as 'hungry for health' and the logo soon became well known. Fascinating Food Facts became part of the daily pupil bulletin and Healthy Eating was used as an assembly theme. This helped pupils to understand why the school was making the changes. A cookbook was developed and the dining room redecorated and named 'Eat Street'. Regular food tastings and questionnaires let pupils have their say.

(Source- Lancashire Healthy Schools Programme [www.lhsp.org.uk](http://www.lhsp.org.uk))

## You could ask your child:

- If your child has breakfast at school, what do they have? Are there healthier choices available? Are activities offered?
- What does your child think about the school meals at the school?
- Does the school offer healthy school meal options? If so, does your child choose these?
- Do they have access to water throughout the day?
- Is there a tuckshop or a vending machine? If so, what kind of food and drink do they sell?
- What is your child learning at school about healthier eating?

## You could ask other parents:

- What do they think about the quality of food in the school?
- Have they any ideas for how it could be improved?

## You could ask your child's school:

- Do they have a breakfast club?
- Do they offer a healthy, balanced, meal at lunchtime? What drinks are available?
- Who provides the school meals? If it is an outside supplier, you might want to talk to them as well.
- What's on the menu each day? Is there plenty of variety? There may be taster sessions so that you can try the food.
- How are healthier options promoted and how are lunchtimes managed? Do all the choices last until the end of lunchtime?
- Is the school part of the Healthy Schools Programme or working towards being a healthy school?
- Does the school have a School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG)? What food clubs or activities does the school run?
- If your child has special dietary needs for moral, religious, health or other reasons- how is food prepared and cooked? What ingredients are used?



Holding a **'Healthy Week'** can be very popular and help raise awareness. All lessons have a healthy theme for the week with lots of activities and visitors to the school. These can include: aerobics, street dancing, fitness circuits perhaps with a local football or rugby club coming along. During the week lots of healthy food should be available, including fresh fruit at playtime, fruit salads, healthy sandwiches and drinks and advice on healthy packed lunches and snacks. There can be health related quizzes and competitions.

A small, rural secondary school decided to run a Healthier Cookery Club. A teacher, a parent and a chef helped to run the club aimed at helping some Year 9 pupils who lacked self-confidence. They wanted to teach the pupils to cook more difficult recipes such as quiches using fresh ingredients. The chef was responsible for planning the menus. All the pupils enjoyed coming to the club, understood more about having a balanced diet and made new friends as well as learning to cook.

(Source- Food in Schools Toolkit)

# What next?

If you are not happy with what your school is providing, or feel that it should be doing more, there are lots of things you can do to help.

## ...at home

- What happens at school needs to be supported by what happens at home. Developing a healthier lifestyle and eating a balanced diet benefits everyone - not just your child. It doesn't have to cost more to eat healthily and can cost less. Try to get the family to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day and eat less fat, salt and sugar;
- Help your child get interested in cooking and eating different foods. Encourage your child to help you cook or there may be a cooking club at school- you could try out some different foods and recipes together. Remember that children may need to get used to different tastes so let them try things several times;
- Take your child food shopping to look at different types of food and drink and discuss what to buy. Try to take a look at items that you don't normally buy and maybe give them a try;
- Talk to your child about what they eat and drink at school, what there is to choose from and what they've learned about food. Look at healthier eating information- the websites at the back of this guide have sections just for them;
- If your child takes a packed lunch, make it healthier with lots of fruit and vegetables, for example adding salad to sandwiches. You might not be able to put certain items in so check first with the school. Don't forget a drink- water, milk or pure fruit juice.



## ...at school

- Offer to help the school set up or run clubs about food, for example, Growing Clubs and Cooking Clubs. Offer to join the school's SNAG or suggest starting one up. You could work with other parents to do this. Schools really need your support to make changes happen;
- If the school is not already involved in these sorts of activities, talk to other parents, the Parent Teacher Association, the school and governors about where to start. Use the Food in School Toolkit to help;
- If you have any concerns, talk to the head or parent governors. If you do not think your concerns are being dealt with, write to the Chair of the Governing Body.



# Find out more



There are a number of websites on the internet which give information and advice about healthy eating and food in schools. If you don't have the internet at home, ask at your local library.

Websites worth looking at are as follows:

- Want to know more about introducing healthier food and drink in schools? Visit [www.foodinschools.org](http://www.foodinschools.org) to find out more
- Learn more about being healthier at [www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk) and [www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk](http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk) or you could pick up information at your local health centre or from your school health team
- What is a Healthy School? Find out by asking your school or looking on [www.lhsp.org](http://www.lhsp.org)
- What should your child be learning about food?  
[www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/healthyliving/curriculum](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/healthyliving/curriculum)
- Are your children eating enough fruit and vegetables? Go to [www.5aday.nhs.uk](http://www.5aday.nhs.uk)
- For information about packed lunches look at [www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2004/sep/lunchbox2](http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2004/sep/lunchbox2)
- Want to find out how other schools have improved their meals? Try [www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/procurement/casestudies/index.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/sustain/procurement/casestudies/index.htm)

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