

School Food Champions Programme



Case Study # 7

All you need is a Champion

The School Food Champions (SFC) pilot programme engaged with over 60 food teachers in secondary schools throughout England. Overall, the programme helped to increase healthy school meal uptake by at least 5%. In the 88% schools that recorded this increase, 28 additional meals were served per day per school. This means that for every £10 invested in the pilot, schools received £16.88 in return.

The SFC was a new, innovative approach to increasing school lunch uptake. It focused on empowering staff and expertise already in schools to make a real difference. While resources and support was available, the key feature of the programme centred on the food teacher becoming a vehicle for change in their own school community, not outside programmes prescribing a solution.

Ready and informed

The SFC programme demonstrated that Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) and Governors appreciated the support and dedication from the food teacher. It also highlighted key food issues to management, enabling discussion of pertinent whole school approaches, such as:

- focusing on the schools current food policy (if in existence) and how it is monitored;
- reviewing the latest Ofsted inspection framework, noting how healthy eating and wellbeing issues are being raised up the agenda;
- ascertaining whether the food based standards from the School Food Plan are being met (or in some cases, becoming informed about their existence);
- NC and competences;
- acknowledging the link between pupil health and wellbeing and attainment;
- having a awareness of the benefits of eating in the school canteen, e.g. keeping pupils on site, health, budget.

Empowerment

The pilot showed that when Champions were created, and empowered to make change, they rose to the challenge and made an impact. Food teachers reported:

- they had a higher profile in school through their involvement and engagement in school food issues;
- pupils demonstrated more 'pupil voice' through menu suggestions and participation in discussion groups;
- caterers actively participated in the programme, relishing the opportunity to work collaboratively and promote school food more widely;
- parents were better informed and interaction increased;
- SLT/Governors could see the impact of change, through better monitoring and feedback.

What Works Well

- Ensuring that the SLT is fully appraised on the importance of food in the context of health, wellbeing and attainment.
- Utilising the existing expertise of the food teacher to act as a Champion for the school.
- Linking food provision and the curriculum together – enabling pupils to create and cook meals in lesson which feature on the lunch menu.

Better and more meals

The SFC programme successfully brought together SLT, the food teacher, pupils, parents and the catering manager to make effective change. This collaboration was pioneered via the Champion, with the backing of the SLT, and resulted in:

- more pupils taking a school lunch – 5% increase;
- an increased variety of dishes, new serving styles, modified queueing and cashless systems being trialled;
- pupils creating, cooking and tasting new meal ideas with the canteen staff;
- theme days showcasing pupils dishes and meals celebrating cultural diversity;
- canteen staff energised to promote, cook and serve better food.

Learning

The programme showed that having the food teacher actively involved in increasing school meal uptake worked. Key learning included:

- monitor uptake – establish a baseline for comparison, consider issues such as how many pupils eligible for free school meal take up the entitlement;
- time keeping – ensure that staff and others have the time and other resources to effectively lead and make a difference;
- curriculum matters –linking school food provision to the curriculum results in greater pupil voice, leading to enhanced lunchtime options and greater canteen involvement;
- not just lunch – the school canteen increased its visibility by interacting more with pupils, staff and parents;
- tell all – keeping everyone informed of progress and celebrating successes is important, making the whole school community come together;
- new skills – teachers reported the development of new skills and ways of working, which also supported their teaching and professional development.

The DfE programme was run by a small consortium, with each partner bringing specific strengths and experiences:

- British Nutrition Foundation: nutrition, health and wellbeing;
- Design & Technology Association: food education and the curriculum;
- Eagle Solutions Services: catering services operations and school food provision.

How to achieve this in your school

To have this impact in your school, consider the following characteristics of good practice:

- make food a priority with SLT and Governors and get your champion in place;
- conduct a food provision and education audit and develop a plan;
- pay attention to pupil voice;
- work with the catering team collaboratively;
- implement quick wins, such as themed days, rewards and pupil menus;
- tell everyone what you are doing – don't keep it a secret;
- monitor and tweak your plan;
- embed, celebrate and sustain.

Get in touch

For more information, go to: www.schoolfoodchampions.org.uk

A Champion's voice

Sophie Cowell, Withernsea High School, increased their uptake by 11.1% (with an amazing 28% increase in uptake for free school meals). After asking staff and students what they thought, their focus has been on revamping the menu, with the help of the students. They also held a competition to rename the canteen and worked with the art teachers to make the canteen more attractive with great displays. "The head cook came back from the summer with new ideas, we researched what the students wanted to eat and now have a salad bar, more traditional food and introduced a meal deal".

Acknowledgement

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