

School Food Champions Programme



Case Study # 6

School food – a fresh approach

Results from the DfE School Food Champions (SFC) Programme, a new innovative approach to school food, show that the majority of the secondary schools that participated increased their school lunch uptake by at least 5%.

The Programme embraced establishing good working relationships between the SLT, curriculum and canteen team. In many pilot schools, this led to a higher profile for the important role and impact of the canteen, a shared common goal (pupil health and wellbeing), better understanding of pressures, limits and constraints (learning from one another), and more pupils taking lunch.

The bottom line

Increasing school lunch uptake means more pupils purchasing from the school canteen – meaning greater cash takings. This pilot shows that where the entire school works together, embracing a positive approach to school food culture, lunch uptake does increase by at least 5%. In the 88% schools that recorded this increase, 28 additional meals were served per day per school.

The approach

The SFC Programme centred on the food teacher in the school facilitating change and bringing people together. Sharing their passion and knowledge, they worked with SLT and canteen staff set a plan of action, based on their audit of needs. The key was about empowering the school to make its own decisions – less about interventions being pushed on them. This resulted in trust building and shared appreciation for the restrictions and constraints faced by all – as well as taking opportunities to work together for the greater good.

The power of quick-wins

To achieve increases, quick-wins were implemented in schools, including:

- themed meals and pupils dishes on menus;
- open evenings, allowing parents/carers try different options;
- clearer menus on display, so all pupils could see what was available, including pictorial menus in some SEN schools;
- taster pots for new dishes, encouraging pupils to try new foods;
- better promotion of what was on offer.

What Works Well

- The School Food Champions approach helped increase uptake by at least 5% in a majority of the pilot schools.
- Collaboration was important, with SLT providing support and the caterer helping with data on school lunch uptake.
- Engaging with pupils to create menus, hold theme days and showcasing skills, events and celebrations throughout the year.

A Champion's voice

Jenny Ruth, Brentwood County High School, increased school lunch uptake by 9.7%.



They launched the programme in their parent newsletter and after their initial surveys of what the whole school thinks of its lunch, created an inter-house competition to design a new school lunch that meets the new school food standards.

Pupil voice through cooking

Many schools focused on linking the curriculum to the canteen. The food teacher challenged pupils to create and cook a range of dishes that could be sold in the canteen – meeting food standards. Catering staff then judged pupil dishes and selected those that could be placed on the menu. Feedback showed that many pupils helped to cook and serve their dishes, feeling a sense of pride and ownership.



Learning

The School Food Champions showed that teaching and canteen staff can actively work together to help increase school lunch uptake. Key learnings included:

- leadership from the SLT is required to set the whole school agenda;
- the approach works for all different catering types, such as in-house and private contract;
- there is a need for commitment from all parties, particularly the SLT, food teacher and canteen team;
- pupil voice and interaction makes a difference;
- small steps (quick-wins) help, and don't forget to celebrate your successes;
- helping schools know the number of pupils having a school meal each day helps to set a baseline, from which progress can be measured;
- joined up work between the curriculum and canteen works – provide opportunities for pupils to create school lunches, judged by the catering team;



How to achieve this in your school

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

- discuss the SFC approach with the food teacher/s and SLT – they may not be aware of this innovative way of working;;
- be open to change – pupil voice has been shown to make a difference – get involved, try new things (learning from mistakes on the way!);
- embed the school food guidelines, set out by the School Food Plan, for the whole school day – if they are not followed, why?;
- start with 'quick wins' and develop plans over time, working with the entire school;
- keep at it – everyone is busy with conflicting priorities, but this consistent, positive approach works – with the ultimate goal: better food and increased uptake resulting in positive health and wellbeing for pupils.

Get in touch

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

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