

School Food Champions Programme



Case Study # 4

Your child – health, wellbeing and attainment

Food teachers in secondary schools throughout England have been involved in the School Food Champions (SFC) Programme. The programme helped to increase healthy school meal uptake by at least 5%. The role of parents and carers played an important part in this achievement. Other added benefits also emerged, particularly supporting pupil's health and wellbeing, as well as attainment.

Being aware

Feedback from the SFC showed that parents/carers appreciated being kept informed, as well as consulted on the food that was offered at school. There were a range of approaches used, including updates and news on websites, social media posts, newsletters and notice boards. It was also important to ensure that they were kept informed of lunch choices and availability, especially where pupils had a voice and helped to create the menu. Some schools invited parents in to sample the school lunch menu, either at lunchtime or during a parents evening. A few schools had cooking activities for parents, helping to showcase different recipes used, as well as 'Mum/Dad chef of the year' competitions to raise interest in school food.

For some parents, understanding that the free school meal entitlement was not being used helped. Where budgets were tight, money could be saved as a healthy school lunch was freely available. For others, it was the simple realisation that when pupils have a school lunch it can make home life easier, as no packed lunches need to be made.

Schools do listen

A key success to the SFC was pupil voice – where pupils' ideas and comments are taken on board and things happen as a result. Rather than school meals just being about complaints, activity here focused on pupils creating new dishes and menus, working with the caterers, and on occasion, helping to cook! Some schools called them 'pupil School Food Champion teams', while others worked through existing student councils. The result was more pupils choosing to have a school lunch and pupils being rewarded and recognised for their creativity.

What Works Well

- Research evidence collated by Public Health England shows that education and health are closely linked. Promoting the health and wellbeing of pupils within schools and colleges has the potential to improve their educational outcomes and their health and wellbeing outcomes.
- Parents/carers wanted to be aware of the school food policy, as well as the menu and other food news.
- Pupil voice has a real impact – helping to increase school meal uptake.

A Champion's voice

The School Food Champion from Mount Carmel School actively encouraged pupils to be creative and cook a range of delicious school main meals. This type of activity helps to increase school lunch numbers.



Health

Schools should be following the guidelines provided by the School Food Plan. The food standards clearly and helpfully show how schools can cook and serve delicious, tasty and healthy meals for pupils. The principles of the standards were taught in food lessons, helping to inform pupils about healthy eating in a real life context, urging them to choose wisely. This aspect of the SFC programme worked well, encouraging pupils to be creative and cook a range of meals that could be served in the school canteen. Teachers involved in the SFC reported that pupils wanted more variety at lunchtime, awareness of healthy eating improved and that pupils chose more balanced meals.



Learning

While the programme showed that having the food teacher actively involved in increasing school meal uptake worked, it also showed the importance of parents and carers being informed. Key learning included:

- as there is a link between health and wellbeing and attainment, parents should be informed about the schools food policy and approach to better food provision?;
- schools can use lots of simple ways to keep parents informed, often using tried and tested channels, e.g. newsletters, parent evenings;
- teachers reported that pupils had a greater awareness of healthy food and meals by being involved in the school meal process;
- schools should encourage and act of 'pupil voice', helping to increase uptake and engagement in school food.



Sharon Hodgson MP, chair of a government group overseeing school food, visited a school to see the great work in action herself.

How to achieve this in your school

To ensure that your child's school is having a positive contribution on their health and wellbeing, consider the following:

- ask questions and find out what happens – *Does your school meet the food based standards in the School Food Plan? Is there a School Food Policy? What progress is being made to promote healthy eating in school? How many 'food' lessons do pupils have a year?*
- get involved – join in school activities, such as tasting events and cooking – it's a great way to find out what's really happening at your school to promote the health of your child;
- keep informed – check out the school website or follow them on social media;
- make it simple – encourage your child to have a school lunch, it's easier for you and them, and there is a variety of choice.

Get in touch

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

Acknowledgement

The School Food Champions programme was funded by the Department for Education and run by the consortium comprising the Design and Technology Association, the British Nutrition Foundation and Eagle Solutions Services.