

The Children's Food Campaign
Sustain
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12 October 2006

Rt Hon. Alan Johnson MP,
Secretary of State for Education.
Sanctuary Buildings,
Great Smith Street,
London, SW1P 3BT

Dear Secretary of State,

The undersigned organisations all have considerable experience of, or interest in, the issue of food in schools and have followed your recent announcements on funding and food curriculum with great interest.

We are very pleased that the Government is extending funding for improved meals and the School Food Trust until 2011, and are very pleased that the announcement on the standards for school food so closely follows the excellent recommendations of the School Meals Review Panel. We also welcome the Government's programme of voluntary cookery lessons for children.

However, we are deeply disappointed that your department appears to have gone back on your predecessor Ruth Kelly's commitment to make cooking a compulsory part of the curriculum. Instead of being in the core curriculum, your department has made practical food skills merely an option within the Key Stage 3 Design and Technology curriculum.

Given your department's insistence that cookery and practical food skills are only an option, it would be unsurprising if a number of schools chose to leave out the 'food' element given the litany of difficulties, challenges and failures in the teaching of cooking, described in the damning report by Ofsted on 'Food Technology in Schools' published in March 2006. Among their many robust criticisms was that:

"there is a fundamental and so far unresolved dichotomy between teaching about food to develop skills for living and using food as a means to teach the objectives of design and technology".

You will be aware of the strong recommendation of the School Meals Review Panel, set up by your predecessor Ruth Kelly, that preparation and cooking of

food along with an understanding of food hygiene should be put back into the compulsory or 'core' curriculum.

It is a national scandal that so many young people leave our schools unable to prepare a simple meal. Poor diet is a key cause of the current obesity epidemic. And, quite simply, those without basic cooking skills are very likely to be condemned to a shorter life because they will be left with little alternative but to buy expensive, processed food - high in fats, sugar and salt - and pass this pattern of behaviour onto their children.

For over 15 years we have allowed children to leave school with little or no practical ability to prepare and cook food and to do it safely. Many of those children will now be parents themselves and, unless they were lucky enough to have been taught these skills in the home, will have been left lacking the ability to look after themselves, let alone others in their care.

As welcome as the voluntary cooking courses are, they are no substitute for compulsory practical food lessons. The nature of such voluntary courses is that they are attended by children whose parents already understand the importance of diet and nutrition. The children who will not attend these courses will tend to be the very ones who lack practical food skills, or the motivation to acquire them.

There is an urgent need to break the vicious circle of ignorance and poor diet which is maintained by our failure to give all children this basic life skill during their school life.

We therefore urge you to reconsider your position on food technology in Key Stage 3 and place food preparation and cooking skills along with basic food safety, back into compulsory 'core' curriculum so all children will benefit.

Despite your clear commitment to improve food in schools, there will be little change in children's food behaviour or diet until this is done.

We would welcome the chance to meet with you to discuss our concerns.

Yours faithfully,

Sara Jayne Stanes, Director, Academy of Culinary Arts
Pat Schooling, Action Against Allergy
Michelle Berriedale-Johnson, Allergy Alliance
Marion Briggs, Alliance for Childhood
Karen Reay, Director, Amicus - CPHVA
Mary Bousted, General Secretary, Association of Teachers and Lecturers
Nickie Roberts, Executive Director, Blood Pressure Association
Dr Nigel Carter, Chief Executive, British Dental Health Foundation
Peter Hollins, Director General, British Heart Foundation
Don Harrison, British Institute for Allergy & Environmental Therapy

Vivienne Streeter, British Institute for Brain Injured Children
Prof. Vivienne Nathanson, Director of Professional Activities, British Medical Association
Joe Harvey, Caroline Walker Trust and Health Education Trust
Dr Mike Rayner, Chair, Children's Food Campaign
Prof. Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy, City University
Sarah Sleet, Chief Executive, Coeliac UK
Joanna Butten, Project Co-ordinator, Consensus Action on Salt and Health
Jill Harrison, Contact a Family
Dr Eric Brunner, Coronary Prevention Group
Douglas Smallwood, Chief Executive, Diabetes UK
Lawrence Woodward, Director, Elm Farm Organic Research Centre
Dr Erik Millstone, FACT - the Food Additives Campaign Team
Hetty Selwyn, Farmers' Link
Dr Alex Richardson, Founder Director, Food And Behaviour Research
Jessica Mitchell, Director, Food Commission
Ron Bailey, Food Justice Campaign
Vicki Hird, Senior Campaigner - food and farming, Friends of the Earth
Kierra Box, Hands up for...
Sue Foreman, Assistant Director, Hemsall Consultancies
Steve Nash, HUSH UK
Sally Bunday MBE, Chair, Hyperactive Children's Support Group
Elaine Tilling, Institute of Health Promotion and Education
Dr Tim Lobstein, International obesity expert
Ayesha Owusu-Barnaby, Head of Campaigns & Public Affairs , Macmillan Cancer Support
Lisa Payne, Principal Policy Officer, National Children's Bureau
Mary MacLeod, Chief Executive, National Family and Parenting Institute
Fay Mansell, Chair, National Federation of Women's Institutes
Paul Lincoln, Chief Executive, National Heart Forum
Dr Colin Waive, Chair, National Obesity Forum
Pat Taylor, National Oral Health Promotion Group
Steve Sinnott, General Secretary , National Union of Teachers
Richard Mckie, Health Lead, National Youth Agency
Cathy Court, Netmums
Andrew P Dougal OBE, Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Chest Heart & Stroke
Lizzie Vann MBE, Founder & Managing Director, Organix Brands
Dr. Mitch Blair, Co-chair, Child Public Health Interest Group, Royal College of Paediatrics and Faculty of Public Health
Dr Barry Jones, Chair of Nutrition Committee , Royal College of Physicians
Prof. Richard Parish, Chief Executive, Royal Society for the Promotion of Health
Christopher Clouder , Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship
Fi Bird, Stirrin' Stuff
Oliver Tickell, tfX - the UK campaign against trans fats in food
Ron Gainsford, Chief Executive, Trading Standards Institute
Christine Lewis, National Officer, Unison
Caroline Swain, Executive Director, Weight Concern
Dr Mike Joffe, Wellbeing Health and Economic Policy Services (WHEPS)