

Professor Becky Francis CBE
Curriculum and Assessment Review Team
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

21 November 2022

Dear Professor Francis and members of the Curriculum & Assessment Review Team,

We are a group of parents from across England who work together with the Children's Food Campaign and Sustain as ambassadors, to share our own lived experiences and those of parents around us, to help improve government policy in support of children's health. We are concerned and frustrated at current policies failing to sufficiently address the food environment our children are having to grow up in – including in our schools.

We are writing to you now to share our thoughts and suggestions in response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review, with a particular focus on food education in schools across England.

We created [Our Children, Our Future: A Parents' Manifesto](#) for Healthier Children's Food, which we were pleased to be able to present to Early Years and Education Minister Stephen Morgan MP earlier this month. It highlights the primary concerns of parents from across the UK, drawing on research with over 2000 parents from all demographic backgrounds.

The manifesto presents five key areas for change, with improvements in schools as the top priority for parents. This includes a curriculum that engages students in food education from farm to fork, and ensures these principles are reflected throughout the school environment. We believe food education should be broad, hands-on, and experiential, encompassing practical cooking, growing food, sustainability, and cultural food traditions.

As parents, we believe that food education plays an essential role in helping children develop life skills, adopt healthier lifestyles, and explore career opportunities in sectors vital to society. To achieve this, a whole-school approach is needed to ensure food education is prioritised in every school. Whilst not part of your own review, this must be reinforced by a more inclusive approach to ensuring healthy school meals for all, from nursery to sixth form.

Currently, food education is part of the Design and Technology (D&T) curriculum at Key Stages 1-3 (KS1-KS3), offering a foundation for teaching healthy eating, food origins, and basic cooking skills. However, the scope of this content is too narrow. While subjects like Science and Health Education touch on related topics, food education is delivered inconsistently, and the curriculum does not adequately address modern challenges.

To make food education more comprehensive and impactful, we propose the following measures:

- **Curriculum Strengthening:** We must ensure food education reflects the principles of healthy eating, and prepares children to cook healthy, simple meals from scratch, as well as where their food comes from, how it is grown, and how supply chains work. We want you to ensure food education is integrated across all stages, from early years

to secondary school, and broaden scope to include more focus on sustainability, climate change, food systems, and culturally diverse food practices.

- **Mandatory Inspection:** As parents we have realised the huge disparities in the quality of food education between different schools, as well as at different stages of education. Although Design and Technology is looked at by Ofsted, there should be more specific focus on checking how schools are teaching Cooking and Nutrition – or wider food education – and handling food throughout the school day. We want to see more oversight on how schools are teaching children about food, health and sustainability, what is being learnt, and the skills being developed in school that prepare them for future life.
- **Practical Learning:** Every child should leave primary school with a good understanding of what food is healthy, and be able to cook five simple, healthy recipes from scratch. By the time they leave secondary school, young people should be able to improvise healthy meals without the need to follow a recipe. We want to see inclusion of gardening/food growing in the curriculum from early years onwards, connecting food education to environmental awareness and teaching children practical life skills.
- **Career Opportunities:** We strongly urge you to reintroduce the Food A-Level to continue to provide a pathway for young people choosing to stay in school to continue to build their culinary and nutritional skills and knowledge, rather than force them to leave school early to pursue this via other vocational routes. This could also address skills shortages in the food, hospitality, and farming sectors, which employ a significant portion of the UK workforce.

We recognise there are challenges in delivering food education effectively. The current focus is more on knowledge than practical skills, and schools face barriers such as limited resources, lack of teacher training, and costs of ingredient fees. Where schools cannot afford to provide all ingredients, the need for parents to contribute these can increase stigma and disincentivise low income students from taking these options, thus widening health and educational disparities. These issues particularly affect students from lower-income families, who may not have access to nutritious food or cooking opportunities outside of school.

To overcome these challenges, we propose a whole-school approach to embed food education across the curriculum, supported by extracurricular activities like gardening / food growing, visits to farms or community kitchen gardens, and cooking clubs. Teachers should receive ongoing training, resources, and access to centralised lesson plans to ensure consistency. Food education should also be linked to sustainability topics in Science, Geography, and other subjects. To remove barriers, schools should provide the necessary ingredients for cooking lessons and ensure food education is free for all students, regardless of background.

Improving food education benefits both children and society by promoting lifelong healthy eating habits, improving public health, and teaching valuable life skills like creativity and teamwork. By making food education central to every child's experience, we can foster healthier lives, open career opportunities, and prepare them for the challenges ahead.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these suggestions. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss them further.

Yours sincerely,

Children's Food Campaign Parent Ambassadors

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