



# Children's Food Campaign's Submission to the School Food Plan

February 2013

1. **Introduction**
2. **Summary of recommendations**
3. **Creating a protective environment in the whole school**
4. **The importance of healthy and sustainable school food**
5. **School food standards**
6. **Budgets and building regulations**
7. **Free school meals**
8. **The crucial role of food education and skills**
9. **Protecting children from junk food marketing**

## 1. Introduction

The Children's Food Campaign aims to improve young people's health and well-being through better food – and food teaching – in schools and by protecting children from junk food marketing. We are supported by over 150 national organisations and co-ordinated by Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming (for more information see [www.childrensfood.org.uk](http://www.childrensfood.org.uk)). This submission has been circulated to all our supporting organisations for their comments.

## 2. Summary of recommendations

The Children's Food Campaign calls for the School Food Plan to recommend that:

- food and nutrient based standards for food in schools apply to all schools, including academies and free schools
- nutrient-based standards remain as the framework on which food based standards are based
- Ofsted monitors food in schools and its impact on pupils' wellbeing
- investment is provided for school kitchen facilities and training
- minimum specifications for school kitchens and dining rooms are reinstated
- free school lunches are provided for all children living in poverty
- free school breakfasts are available for all children eligible for free school lunches
- practical cooking skills are included on the curriculum for Key Stages 1-3
- food growing is incorporated by all schools into their learning plans
- the government adopts an effective and cross-government approach to protecting children from marketing of foods and drinks high in fat, salt and sugar

## 3. Creating a protective environment in the whole school

Food and nutrient-based standards are the foundation for good school food practices, providing legally binding minimum standards that all schools must achieve. However, as the World Health Organisation recognises, the school environment can make a big difference to improving children's diet-related health and well-being.<sup>1</sup> Packed lunch nutrition policies, stay-on-site policies, the facilities and space in the school day and on the school grounds for children to participate in cooking and food growing activities are all necessary components of a whole-school approach. As more parents struggle to afford nutritious food for their families, the role of free school meals becomes more important too. These issues are explored in more detail below.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation (2011), *Healthy Nutrition in Schools*. Available: [www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/disease-prevention/nutrition/news/news/2011/09/healthy-nutrition-in-schools](http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/disease-prevention/nutrition/news/news/2011/09/healthy-nutrition-in-schools)

To become healthy adults, children must develop healthy eating habits from an early age. However, constant exposure to marketing for unhealthy snacks and foods positions these products firmly in the mainstream diet of most children. A recent UK Government report on commercialisation recognised that whilst parents have a major responsibility in helping their children deal with the pressures of growing up, they need help in doing so.<sup>2</sup> Although schools can offer a significant part of that help, their best efforts are undermined by a potent ‘obesogenic’ environment in which calorie-dense junk foods are promoted everywhere: on the billboards that pupils pass on their way to school, in the adverts and product placement on the television they watch, in the advergames they play on their phones, on displays and promotions in the shops and malls they hang out in, and even by the sponsors of some of their favourite sports, celebrities and events. Retailers, manufacturers and the government need to do much more to give parents a helping hand in making the healthy choice for their family the easiest choice.

#### 4. The importance of healthy and sustainable school food

Appetising and nutritious school food, produced sustainably, is important for children's health, for their education and for their future well-being. Many children in the UK have poor diets, with the National Diet and Nutrition Survey showing that the vast majority of children consume too much saturated fat, sugar and salt and only one in ten children eat the recommended five portions a day of fruit and vegetables.<sup>3</sup> Diets tend to be particularly poor amongst children from low income households.<sup>4</sup> Therefore the food and information about food that children are provided at school has a key role to play in shaping their present and future diet, and in turn their behaviour and health.<sup>5</sup>

There is also evidence that as well as promoting physical health, a balanced diet contributes to children's mental health and well-being, leading to improvements in children's behaviour and ability to take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them. Conversely, a diet inadequate in quality or quantity can impede children's ability to learn.<sup>6</sup>

Responding in March 2012 to a report on the impact of Universal Credit, the Government stated that “healthy school food underpins work to improve academic standards, improve behaviour at school, reduce incidence of preventable illness and improve social equality. Healthy school dinners are an important source of nourishment, particularly for children from poorer families. Some families struggle to afford school lunches and a school lunch may be the only balanced meal some disadvantaged children get”.<sup>7</sup>

School food can also bring wider benefits and educational opportunities, if it is produced, processed and traded in ways that contribute to thriving local economies and sustainable livelihoods – both in the UK and, in the case of imported products, in producer countries; protects the diversity of both plants and animals (and the welfare of farmed and wild species), and avoids damaging natural resources and contributing to climate change.

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<sup>2</sup> Bailey Review (2011), *Letting Children Be Children: the Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood*. Available: [www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/CM%208078](http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/CM%208078)

<sup>3</sup> Department of Health (2012), *National Diet and Nutrition Survey: Headline results from Years 1, 2 and 3 (combined) of the Rolling Programme (2008/2009 – 2010/11)*. Available: <http://transparency.dh.gov.uk/2012/07/25/ndns-3-years-report>

<sup>4</sup> Dowler, E. (2008), *Policy initiatives to address low-income households' nutritional needs in the UK*. Proceedings of the Nutrition Society (2008), 67, pp.289-300

<sup>5</sup> School Meals Review Panel (2005), *Turning the tables: transforming school food*. Available: [www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/assets/research-reports/Turning\\_The\\_Tables.pdf](http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/assets/research-reports/Turning_The_Tables.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Associate Parliamentary Food and Health Forum (2007), *Links between diet and behaviour. The influence of nutrition on mental health*. Available: [www.foodforthebrain.org/media/229766/FHF.pdf](http://www.foodforthebrain.org/media/229766/FHF.pdf); School Food Trust (2009), *School lunch and learning behaviour in primary schools: an intervention study*. Available: [www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk](http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk). School Food Trust (2009), *School lunch and learning behaviour in secondary schools: an intervention study*. Available: [www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk](http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk)

<sup>7</sup> Report by the Social Security Advisory Committee and response by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (March 2010), p10. Available: [www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/ssac-rev-of-pass-bens-response.rtf](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/ssac-rev-of-pass-bens-response.rtf)

## 5. School food standards

### Impact of the standards

The School Food Trust has produced a thorough analysis of school meals which shows just how the introduction of nutritional standards has led to substantial improvements in school food.<sup>8</sup> Pupils opting for school lunches are now much more likely to get healthy, tasty and varied meals. These include at least two portions of fruit and vegetables each day (providing fibre, vitamins and minerals) and have limited fat, sugar and salt content. In contrast, a recent survey found that only one per cent of packed lunches met the standards for school meals.<sup>9</sup>

### Universal application of the standards

There are already more than 2,500 academy schools in England. Since academies and free schools are not subject to the standards, this means there are now more than one million pupils whose school food does not have to meet minimum nutritional standards. Based on the experience of the years before these legally binding standards were introduced, it is more likely than not that poor quality food will creep back on the menu and that fatty, sugary snacks will edge their way back onto school grounds. This has been illustrated by the School Food Trust's 2012 survey of academies, which found nine out of every ten surveyed were selling at least one of the snack foods high in sugar, salt or fat that have been kept out of vending machines in other state schools adhering to the school food standards.<sup>10</sup>

Back in February 2012, the Children's Food Campaign came together with the Jamie Oliver Foundation, the Local Authorities' Catering Association (LACA), the Food for Life Partnership and School Food Matters to launch the Save Our School Food Standards campaign. We have been calling for academies and free schools to be required to comply with the same mandatory standards for school food currently safeguarding the quality of food available in maintained schools.

Together with our campaign partners, we submitted a joint submission to the School Food Plan, which sets out the evidence for why we need to protect the huge investment already made in children's health and wellbeing by ensuring mandatory school food standards apply to all schools.<sup>11</sup> As this joint submission makes clear, standards are just one element of good school food but we believe that mandatory minimum standards represent the foundations of set of school food policies. As a minimum, mandatory standards protect children from unhealthy food that will undermine their ability to learn. At best, standards provide the catalyst for schools to be ambitious and embed excellence in school food and food education.

The campaign is already supported by 116 MPs in Parliament<sup>12</sup>; and the joint submission was backed by over 40 professional bodies, major charities and health campaigns. An overwhelming majority of parents also want the standards applied universally and are worried about a race-to-the-bottom in schools which, for whatever reason, don't see healthy food as a priority. In a survey of 12,000 parents by LACA, 92.3% wanted schools to adhere by the standards and 92.1% thought there should be an independent body to monitor them.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> School Food Trust (2012) *Secondary school food survey 2011*. Available: [www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/research/schoolfoodstandardsresearch/secondaryschoolfoodsurvey](http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/research/schoolfoodstandardsresearch/secondaryschoolfoodsurvey)

<sup>9</sup> School Food Trust (2012) *Secondary school meals versus packed lunches*. Available: [www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/research/schoolfoodstandardsresearch/secondaryschoolfoodsurvey/secondary-school-meals-versus-packed-lunches-2011](http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/research/schoolfoodstandardsresearch/secondaryschoolfoodsurvey/secondary-school-meals-versus-packed-lunches-2011)

<sup>10</sup> School Food Trust (2012), *Food in academy schools*. Available: [www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/research/schoolfoodstandardsresearch/academyschools](http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/research/schoolfoodstandardsresearch/academyschools)

<sup>11</sup> Save Our School Food Standards campaign (2013), *School Food Standards: A Submission to the School Food Plan*. Available: [www.sustainweb.org/resources/files/responses/CFC\\_SOSFood\\_joint\\_submission\\_School\\_Food\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.sustainweb.org/resources/files/responses/CFC_SOSFood_joint_submission_School_Food_Plan.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Early Day Motion 54 (2012-13 session) on School Food Standards. Available: [www.parliament.uk/edm/2012-13/54](http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2012-13/54)

<sup>13</sup> LACA/ParentPay (2012), *Market Research Report on School Meals and Daily Life Issues*. Available: [www.laca.co.uk/sites/default/files/LACA\\_ParentPay\\_Research\\_2012.pdf](http://www.laca.co.uk/sites/default/files/LACA_ParentPay_Research_2012.pdf)

## Nutrient-based standards

The current standards, encompassing both specific foods and drinks that cannot be served in schools and food based and nutrient-based criteria to ensure menus offer a range of nutritionally balanced meals which meet average nutrient requirements, were carefully designed by independent nutrition experts to ensure schools provide healthy, nutritionally-balanced meals. Nutrient based standards provide the public health framework on which any food based standards can be based. As the 2005 *Turning the Tables* report concluded, the food-based standards function “to support the achievement of the nutrient- based standards”, not the other way around.<sup>14</sup> Food Standards Agency (FSA) research has shown that the food group standards in place in 2001 made little difference to the nutrient intakes of children in school and did not limit the amount of unhealthy foods on the menu.<sup>15</sup> There is currently no available evidence to show that food based standards alone would have allowed the step change in school food that has been seen since the introduction of mandatory nutrient based standards.

Whilst minor modifications to the current standards may be needed to update recommended nutrient levels to address those few areas where average intakes are not being met, we do not believe that significant changes to current regulations are either necessary or desirable.

One addition to the food standards we would like to see is the specific exclusion of industrial trans fats in school food, in particular those arising from hydrogenation of polyunsaturated oils (mainly as vegetable oil), or their prolonged high-temperature refining (against accepted good practice). These industrial trans fats are implicated in ill health of many kinds, including their inhibition of the molecular pathways that produce the long-chained omega-3 fatty acids necessary for brain and nervous development.<sup>16</sup>

## Monitoring the standards

Like any set of rules, school food standards are most effective within a framework of support and monitoring to back them up – something which has been variable in the past and in many areas is now lacking. In order to achieve the most benefit, schools should be provided with tools to help them implement the standards and share good practice. The government also needs to make sure that the standards are effectively monitored and enforced and we recommend that it gives Ofsted the responsibility to undertake this role.

The inclusion of appropriate Ofsted inspection criteria would ensure that schools understand the importance of good food and work hard to prioritise healthy food for all their children. These criteria should ensure the influence of good food and food culture extends to every facet of school life. We note that this approach is used in the very successful Scottish model, in which a small team of Health and Nutrition Inspectors assists Scotland’s Ofsted team.<sup>17</sup>

The difficult economic situation is one reason why schools currently need help. Many local authorities have removed their support services for school meals and some schools do not feel able to allocate part of their budget to pay for external nutritional assessment of their school lunches, previously undertaken by their authority.<sup>18</sup> Government must put in place sufficient funding and monitoring arrangements to prevent the nutritional and overall quality of meals failing by the wayside in increasing numbers of schools. One way to achieve this is to make free, simple software available to all schools and caterers which include lots of recipes and menu plans that meet current guidance. This approach was adopted in Scotland as part of the Hungry for Success programme at very reasonable cost.

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<sup>14</sup> School Meals Review Panel (2005), *Turning the tables: transforming school food*. Available: [www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/assets/research-reports/Turning\\_The\\_Tables.pdf](http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/assets/research-reports/Turning_The_Tables.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> FSA (2004), *School meals in secondary schools in England*. Available: [www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/secondaryschoolmeals.pdf](http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/secondaryschoolmeals.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> TfX website, *Trans fat and health – introduction*. Available: [www.tfx.org.uk/page20.html](http://www.tfx.org.uk/page20.html)

<sup>17</sup> Engage for Education website, *School food revolution*. Available: [www.engageforeducation.org/news/school-food-revolution-2](http://www.engageforeducation.org/news/school-food-revolution-2)

<sup>18</sup> Sustain (2012), *Providing good food in schools... How to do it with, or without, local authority help*. Available: [www.sustainweb.org/publications/?id=217](http://www.sustainweb.org/publications/?id=217)

## Sustainable fish standards

The uptake of the Food for Life Catering Mark, with accredited meals now being served in over 5000 schools, demonstrates that sustainability criteria can thrive alongside the statutory nutrient standards, and help drive best practice.

Sustainability standards for fish are not complex, have already been successfully introduced by many schools (but only a minority, and with help from a number of charitable organisations) and have already been incorporated into legally binding Government Buying Standards. We therefore support the recommendations of the Sustainable Fish City campaign that, as part of the school food review, government enacts regulations to prevent Marine Conservation Society red list fish being served to school children; ensure any fish served to children be either Marine Stewardship Council (or equivalent ISEAL standard certified); and ensure fish – if not certified as above – will be Marine Conservation Society green listed and traceable to capture area, stock detail, capture method or farming method.

## School lunchtime policies

Through schools providing healthy, appetising and well-marketed school meals, the proportion of pupils bringing in packed lunch would be expected to decline further. However, for those who would still eat packed lunch, the question of ensuring they are getting a nutritionally-balanced meal is a priority. Alongside providing guidance for parents on preparing healthy packed lunches, schools should back that up by introducing appropriate policies to restrict the same foods and drinks that are not allowed as part of school food and to encourage lunches which meet the same nutritional criteria.

Schools should also allocate enough time for pupils to eat and enjoy their food. A hurried ten minutes in the school canteen is not conducive to a healthy attitude to diet.

## 6. Budgets and building regulations

The School Lunch Grant should be re-introduced and ring-fenced to support the transformation of the school meals service which is still underway. Doing so would also enable the increase in school meal take-up to continue to a level at which the service is economically viable.

School capital funding should also be ring-fenced where necessary to spend on installing and maintaining dining facilities and kitchens sufficient for producing freshly-prepared meals for all pupils. New or renovated schools over the past decade have benefited from school building regulations which specified kitchen and dining room requirements and the minimum amount of outdoor space for exercise. We are concerned that the stripped-down building regulations recently announced will inhibit the ability of schools to provide appetising, nutritious food and have the facilities to promote healthier lifestyles to their pupils.<sup>19</sup> The School Food Plan should recommend that these regulation changes are reversed.

The government has introduced the Pupil Premium as a way to address the current underlying inequalities between children eligible for free school meals.<sup>20</sup> The School Food Plan should encourage schools to spend their Pupil Premium money on setting up gardening and cooking clubs and integrating these initiatives into lessons. Such activities can be an effective way of engaging disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils, helping them find a way to express themselves and giving them something that they feel ownership of and pride in. Another option could be using the Pupil Premium to subsidise the cost of running a breakfast club, as a way of ensuring that pupils from the poorest households start their school day able to learn effectively.

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<sup>19</sup> Department for Education (2012), *Changes to the standards for school premises*. Available: [www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/executiveagencies/efa/schoolscapital/buildingsanddesign/a00212403/changing-standards-school-premises](http://www.education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/executiveagencies/efa/schoolscapital/buildingsanddesign/a00212403/changing-standards-school-premises)

<sup>20</sup> Department for Education (2012), *Pupil Premium – what you need to know*. Available: [www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/premium/a0076063/pp](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/premium/a0076063/pp)

The Department for Education (DfE) should require schools to introduce stay-on-site policies to limit children's exposure to junk food outlets and increase school meal uptake. In addition, local authorities should also use planning regulations to limit fast food restaurants and takeaways near schools. The *Takeaways Toolkit*<sup>21</sup> produced by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and the Mayor of London demonstrates that local councils and communities can use such regulations and other measures to limit the number of fast food outlets sited near areas where large amounts of children congregate, provided there is the will and the leadership.

## **7. Free school meals**

### **The benefits of free school meals**

The educational benefits of free school meals were evident in a July 2012 evaluation of a two year pilot programme that extended entitlement to free school meals to all primary school children in Newham and Durham. This found a significant improvement in attainment for all children. The researchers also noted that the improvements were most pronounced in pupils from poorer homes and amongst those with lower prior attainment.<sup>22</sup> Sadly, many families continue to struggle to afford school meals. In March 2012, the average meal price was £1.88 in primary schools and £1.98 in secondary schools and so, over the course of a year, school meals for a single child could cost an average of £367. An Ofsted report on school food highlighted the case of one family where, anxious for their children to have school meals but unable to afford them for both children, the parents had to arrange for the children to take it in turns to have the meals while the other had a packed lunch.<sup>23</sup>

### **An opportunity for a better system**

The current system for determining which children receive free school meals is far from perfect. Families receiving out of work benefits such as Income Support and Job Seekers Allowance are entitled to free school meals, but generally lose this entitlement if they move into work. As many children living in poverty have at least one parent in work, up to 700,000 children who need free school meals are not entitled to them. In addition, many children who are entitled to free meals fail to take them, either because they are worried about being identified as being from a low-income family or because the family has not been encouraged and enabled to take up this benefit. In some schools children getting free meals have to queue separately and there are many alternative systems to ensure that children are not singled out in any way.

We believe that the health and educational benefits of healthy school meals are sufficient to justify a universal free school meals policy, and as an absolute minimum every child living in poverty should be eligible. Such a policy would also create local jobs, reduce the administrative burden on schools, introduce economies of scale, and could be used to support farmers with higher production standards, including some British farmers.

Universal free school meals could be introduced in stages, with the first step being to ensure that free school meals are available to all children living in poverty. The need to reset eligibility criteria for the new Universal Credit welfare system provides a suitable opportunity to achieve this step. A system in which all families receiving Universal Credit were entitled to free school meals would be the most effective in ensuring work incentives and providing meals, with their health and educational benefits, to those children that need them. The next step would then be providing free school meals to all primary school children. However, we recognise that fiscal constraints may prevent the implementation of such a policy in the short-term. Therefore attention should be paid to improving uptake amongst children already eligible for free school meals. If all pupils used 'oyster'-style cards, such a system could not only avoid the stigma for pupils taking free meals, it would also reduce administration for caterers.

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<sup>21</sup> Mayor of London (2012), *Takeaways Toolkit*. Available: [www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/TakeawaysToolkit.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/TakeawaysToolkit.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Department for Education (2012), *Evaluation of the Free School Meals pilot – impact report*. Available: [www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-RR227](http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-RR227)

<sup>23</sup> Ofsted (2010), *Food in Schools*. Available: [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/food-schools](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/food-schools)

## Free school breakfasts

The numerous benefits of free school breakfasts are widely accepted. Although there is no central government funding for free school breakfast, a DfE spokesperson stated in an Observer feature that “breakfast clubs can improve children’s attendance, concentration, motivation and promote healthy eating habits”.<sup>24</sup> However, breakfast clubs are struggling to find the funding to meet the growing demand. As many schools have to rely on funding from businesses to run the clubs, there is concern that this could undermine the healthiness of the food served to children.

The Welsh government has set a precedent by making school breakfasts a priority over a number of years. The Welsh Assembly has a budget of £12.7m for 2012-13 enabling more than three quarters of primary schools across Wales to provide free breakfasts.<sup>25</sup> We also note that Blackpool has just become one of the first English Councils to follow suit, with a three month pilot project providing free breakfasts to all of its primary school pupils.

Given that school breakfasts can be an important way to improve children’s attainment and reduce inequalities, we recommend that, as a minimum, all children who are eligible for free school lunches should also be eligible for free school breakfasts, including children from all families receiving the new Universal Credit.

Advice should be sought from the Children’s Food Trust as to whether the school food nutritional standards need to be amended to ensure the provision of healthy school breakfasts. In addition, mandatory rules should be introduced which bar companies associated with products that undermine a healthy diet – for example, food and drink products high in sugar and salt – from using school breakfasts to promote their products or brands in, or through, participating schools.

## Free school meals in non-school settings

Receipt of free school meals should not depend on the type of educational establishment which the pupil attends. 14 and 15-year olds at college should be entitled to receive free school meals if they are eligible, as their peers in schools already do.

Likewise, the early learning and health benefits of free nursery places will be maximised for disadvantaged children if they are entitled to a free school meal in their early years setting. For three and four year olds, there is an anomaly in the current situation where local authorities are required to fund free school meals in a maintained setting, but not in a private or voluntary setting, e.g. a nursery, where it is optional.

Currently, the lack of funding for meals for three and four year olds in private and voluntary settings means providers face subsidising meals or not providing them. We believe all two, three and four year olds who meet Free School Meal criteria should have an equal right to benefit from a free meal whatever early years setting they attend. The new free early education offer to reach the 40% most disadvantaged two year olds by 2014-15 is a great opportunity to promote better long term health for an estimated 290,000 disadvantaged two year olds by ensuring they have healthy food and benefit from the learning experience that a meal at their education setting can bring.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Rayner, J., The Observer (16 September 2012), *Why school breakfast clubs are on the education frontline*. Available: [www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/sep/16/breakfast-clubs-schools-funding](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/sep/16/breakfast-clubs-schools-funding)

<sup>25</sup> The Observer, (16 September 2012), *How Wales led the way on school breakfast clubs*. Available: [www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/sep/16/wales-free-breakfast-clubs-schools](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/sep/16/wales-free-breakfast-clubs-schools)

<sup>26</sup> BBC News Online (29 Nov 2011), *Autumn Statement: nursery places plan for 2-year-olds*. Available: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-15937325](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-15937325)

## 8. The crucial role of food education and skills

### Food skills and knowledge are necessary for healthy lives

The Government's 2011 public health white paper, *Healthy Lives, Healthy People*, emphasised the importance of individual responsibility in improving people's health. Such a strategy requires, amongst other things, that people have the knowledge, skills and ability to make healthy choices for themselves and their families. It is therefore vital that the education system equips every child with such attributes.

As well as helping people to prepare nutritious meals for themselves and their families, research shows that practical cooking skills are vital to understanding the importance and make up of a healthy diet.<sup>27</sup> Without these skills and knowledge, people do not have the freedom to exercise meaningful control over their diet and food intake, and tend to over-rely on pre-prepared or takeaway foods.

Take salt consumption as an example: most people in the UK eat more salt than is recommended, yet 75% of the salt we eat is found in processed foods.<sup>28</sup> If children are not taught basic cooking skills at school then they are more likely to eat more processed foods and therefore unnecessarily high levels of salt. Salt increases blood pressure in people of all ages; a high salt diet during childhood will increase blood pressure, predisposing children to high blood pressure and the associated health conditions (most significantly heart disease and stroke) later in life.

Having the skills to identify what foods constitute a healthy diet and how to prepare them is a key way in which people can improve their diet and health. Yet research suggests that many people in the UK lack such skills.<sup>29</sup> It is therefore vital that children are taught these skills at school. The introduction of compulsory practical cooking lessons would go some way to addressing this, but there is also a need for pupils to develop a greater understanding of where their food comes from and how it is produced. Food growing activities can make a considerable contribution to this, with some evidence suggesting that environmental concerns resonate more with young people than health messages; food growing engages pupils on the former while supporting the latter<sup>30</sup>.

### Cooking in schools

We are concerned that decisions made as part of the current curriculum review may result in the absence of practical food preparation activities in the National Curriculum in the future. As it is inevitable that some schools would not prioritise such activities if they were not part of a statutory programme of study, this would mean that many children would miss out on the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge to choose and prepare healthy meals.

Research finds that opportunities for experiential learning, for example through practical food preparation activities, are particularly effective at helping engage or re-engage pupils with learning difficulties.<sup>31</sup> While those from all social groups can suffer from a lack of skills, evidence also suggests that those from less affluent backgrounds find school a more important source of some knowledge and skills, including food preparation.<sup>32</sup> Ensuring that all children are taught practical food preparation skills could therefore be a mechanism for reducing educational and health inequalities and improving the life chances of children from disadvantaged groups.

<sup>27</sup> Caraher, M., Dixon, P., Lang, T., Carr-Hill, R. (1999), *The state of cooking in England: the relationship of cooking skills to food choice*. British Food Journal, 101 (8) p.590 - 609

<sup>28</sup> Consensus Action on Salt and Health (2011), *Eat less salt*. Available [www.actiononsalt.org.uk/less/index.html](http://www.actiononsalt.org.uk/less/index.html)

<sup>29</sup> Blythman, J. (2006), *Bad Food Britain. How a nation ruined its appetite*. London: Fourth Estate.

<sup>30</sup> Food for Life Partnership (2008), *Six steps to transform school food culture*. Available: [www.foodforlife.org.uk/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=tGxNr3emqxY%3D&tabid=175](http://www.foodforlife.org.uk/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=tGxNr3emqxY%3D&tabid=175)

<sup>31</sup> Health Education Association (1999), *Cooking skills and health*. Available : [www.gserve.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/documents/cooking\\_skills\\_health.pdf](http://www.gserve.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/documents/cooking_skills_health.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> National Foundation for Educational Research (2011), *Qualitative impact evaluation of the Food for Life Partnership programme*. Available: [www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/BINT01/BINT01.pdf](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/BINT01/BINT01.pdf)



We believe that a minimum of 24 hours of practical food preparation activities should be provided to each pupil at each of the first three Key Stages, to ensure that all children develop positive attitudes towards food and healthy eating, and the skills and knowledge to choose and prepare a balanced diet. This provision would represent less than one per cent of the teaching time available at Key Stage 3, yet could empower pupils to lead healthy lifestyles

Ensuring children receive good practical cooking skills at school, by including cooking and food education on the curriculum, is something which has attracted widespread support in Parliament and beyond.<sup>33</sup> Celebrity chefs including Jamie Oliver and Gary Rhodes, and Raymond Blanc and Heston Blumenthal through the Chefs Adopt a School Programme, top medical organisations such as the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, and even Liverpool and England captain Steven Gerrard have voiced their support.<sup>34</sup>

### **Every school a food growing school**

In addition, we believe that practical food-growing should be taught in all schools. In our report, *Every School a Food Growing School*<sup>35</sup>, produced jointly with a range of educational and gardening organisations, we demonstrate, such activities can provide a range of educational benefits, including:

- Teaching enterprise skills;
- Building community spirit and a sense of citizenship;
- Encouraging children to lead healthier lives;
- Reducing environmental impact; and
- Raising educational standards.

These findings have subsequently been echoed in the government-commissioned Food Growing in Schools Taskforce report.<sup>36</sup>

Because food growing activities can be a *means* of teaching curriculum subjects, we recognise that it may not be appropriate for food-growing to be timetabled as a National Curriculum subject itself. Instead, we recommend that, just as every school has adequate ICT equipment, every school has a food-growing garden which all pupils are involved in during core teaching time, and that teaching staff have the appropriate skills to make use of these facilities.

We also draw attention to the cross-curricular links that can be made with cooking and food preparation, including mathematics (weighing/measuring, calculating cooking times and nutritional information), science (chemical changes during cooking), geography (origins of food ingredients), history (changing diets).

Given the current failure to commit staff or money to take forward the recommendations of the Food Growing in Schools Taskforce, the DfE should take responsibility to ensure that the good practice in some schools is spread to all schools and benefits pupils nationwide. The Taskforce recommended specific ways the government should recognise the impact of food growing on learning and promote it through policy and communications. We would like to see the Department for Education adopt these recommendations:

- The Curriculum Review should consider the impact of food growing in schools.
- DfE communications should encourage schools to maximise opportunities resulting from greater flexibility throughout the curriculum to use food growing to support learning.

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<sup>33</sup> Early Day Motion 1816 (2010-12 session), *Practical cooking lessons in schools*. Available: [www.parliament.uk/edm/2010-12/1816](http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2010-12/1816)

<sup>34</sup> BBC News Online (6 May 2012), *Steven Gerrard and Jamie Oliver call on PM to fight obesity*. Available: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-17970169](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-17970169)

<sup>35</sup> Children's Food Campaign (2010), *Every school a food-growing school*. Available: [www.sustainweb.org/publications/?id=186](http://www.sustainweb.org/publications/?id=186)

<sup>36</sup> Food Growing in Schools Taskforce Report (2012) Available: [www.gardenorganic.org.uk/pdfs/FGIS%20Main%20Report%20March%202012.pdf](http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/pdfs/FGIS%20Main%20Report%20March%202012.pdf)

- Ofsted inspectors should be made aware of the impact of food growing for pupil outcomes, and encouraged to look at its integration into teaching and learning.
- Food growing should be promoted to teacher-training providers and food growing spaces should be incorporated into new school buildings and into improvements of existing school sites.

The Taskforce report included one cautionary piece of advice for schools, which we believe the School Food Plan needs to ensure is integral to its own recommendations: that because of the proven health and wellbeing benefits of food growing, schools are encouraged to avoid working with companies and brands associated with products that undermine healthy lifestyle messages.

### Whole school approach to food

To have the most impact, all the different strands of school food procurement, policies and education need to be integrated together in a co-ordinated and concerted whole school approach. That is the real value of initiatives like the Food for Life Partnership (FFLP). Participating schools have seen improvements not just in their pupil's health but in their attainment, and in the Ofsted performance of the school itself. Free school meal take-up in FFLP award secondary schools has increased by an average of 20% too.<sup>37</sup>

## 9. Protecting children from junk food marketing

Even with further improvements in meals and food education in schools, children will still be bombarded with many positive images of unhealthy food every day. Food promotion in all its forms - on television, magazines, websites, social media, in-store and through sponsorship - influences what children choose to eat. In 2003, the FSA commissioned an independent systematic review of research on the effects of food promotion to children. This concluded that food promotion not only influences children's food preferences, purchasing behaviour and consumption, but also acts independently of other factors that may influence diet e.g. parents' eating habits.<sup>38</sup> In the years since the FSA systematic review, more research has confirmed these results, and indeed confirmed what parents already know: promoting junk food to children undermines efforts to help their children eat healthily.

Many international agencies and government departments have highlighted the need to protect children from junk food marketing. Recommendations endorsed by the 63<sup>rd</sup> World Health Assembly in 2010 aim to reduce the impact of food marketing on children by reducing both the exposure of children to, and the power of, marketing of unhealthy foods.<sup>39</sup> In 2011, the House of Lords Behaviour Change inquiry noted that tackling food advertising is "particularly cost effective because of its low cost and broad reach"<sup>40</sup>. In its recent 'Sustainable Food' report, The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee has also recommended stricter advertising limits across all media.<sup>41</sup>

We would like to see the DfE ensure there is a joined-up government approach to this issue, working with - and putting pressure on - other relevant government departments to implement stricter regulation. The Children's Food Campaign report *Protecting children from unhealthy food marketing* lists further measures that could be implemented to reinforce the good work in schools in helping parents and children choose healthier food and lifestyles.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Food for Life (2011), *Good Food For All*. Available:

[www.soilassociation.org/schoolfood/foodforlifepartnership/theimpactofthefoodforlifepartnership](http://www.soilassociation.org/schoolfood/foodforlifepartnership/theimpactofthefoodforlifepartnership)

<sup>38</sup> Food Standards Agency (2003), *Review of Research on the effects of food promotion to children*. Available:

[www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/foodpromotiontochildren1.pdf](http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/foodpromotiontochildren1.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> World Health Organisation (2010) *Resolutions of the Sixty-Third World Health p24*. Available:

[http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA63-REC1/WHA63\\_REC1-en.pdf](http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA63-REC1/WHA63_REC1-en.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee (Second Report, 2011), *Behaviour Change*. Available:

[www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201012/ldselect/ldsctech/179/179.pdf](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201012/ldselect/ldsctech/179/179.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (Eleventh Report, 2012), *Sustainable Food*. Available:

[www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmenvaud/879/87902.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmenvaud/879/87902.htm)

<sup>42</sup> Sustain (2008), *Protecting children from unhealthy food marketing*. Available: [www.sustainweb.org/publications/?id=160](http://www.sustainweb.org/publications/?id=160)

The School Food Plan should also refer to the WHO Recommendations on the Marketing of Food and Non-Alcoholic Beverages to Children and Young People, as a basis for its proposals.<sup>43</sup>

Marketing to children not only influences children's choices, but undermines parents' efforts to encourage healthy eating patterns, and undermines school-based and mass media educational campaigns, such as Change4Life. It is important to ensure the coherence of the regulatory environment, so that children are not exposed to contradictory messages. That is why the School Food Plan should include recommendations to restrict all forms of junk food marketing in schools, including sponsorship of sport and other school events.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> World Health Organisation, *Recommendations and Framework Implementation Report on Marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children*. Available: [www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/marketing-food-to-children/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/marketing-food-to-children/en/index.html)

<sup>44</sup> Children's Food Campaign (2012), *The Obesity Games*. Available: [www.sustainweb.org/publications/?id=237](http://www.sustainweb.org/publications/?id=237)

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