

## Schools as Healthy Zones

### A submission from Children's Food Campaign / Sustain to the National Food Strategy call for evidence

**National Food Strategy Priority: Deliver safe, healthy and affordable food, regardless of where people live or how much they earn.**

#### What do we want to see?

Our idea is a transformation of all UK schools and early years' settings into healthy food zones, where there is a total convergence between the food on offer throughout the day, the education of children and the wider school community (teachers, parents, governors, suppliers) and the culture and social activity of the school, in promoting healthy diets and lifestyles.

#### Why this proposal?

We all want children to grow up healthy and happy. Children aged 4-5 years and up spend an average of 190 days of every year in school. Yet, 22.9% of children are already classed as overweight or obese when they arrive at primary school, rising to one in three children aged 10/11, which is why the Government established *Childhood Obesity: A Plan For Action* in 2016<sup>1</sup>, released Chapter Two in 2018<sup>2</sup> and has signalled further actions through the new *Advancing Our Health: Prevention in the 2020s* Green Paper in 2019<sup>3</sup>.

Many schools have been working in recent years to transform their food culture to a healthier environment, championed through individual school leadership, galvanised by the announcement of the School Food Plan in 2013<sup>4</sup>, and the adoption of School Food Standards which came into force in January 2015<sup>5</sup>. In particular, there are some beacons of good practice in many primary schools and amongst those who have also worked as part of local authority Healthy Schools awards programmes or voluntary programmes such as Soil Association's Food for Life catering commitment<sup>6</sup>.

However progress is patchy and often inconsistent, and for parents and children alike the quality and health of the food, or education about food, nutrition, healthy eating or cooking skills can be a lottery from one school to another. In particular, progress in primary settings is often not continued in the school food environments children find themselves in from age 11 onwards. The food education learning landscape has documented that despite nutrition education being mandatory since 2014, it is not consistently being delivered<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childhood-obesity-a-plan-for-action>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childhood-obesity-a-plan-for-action-chapter-2>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/advancing-our-health-prevention-in-the-2020s/advancing-our-health-prevention-in-the-2020s-consultation-document>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/plan/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2014/1603/contents/made>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.foodforlife.org.uk/schools>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.schoolfoodmatters.org/sites/default/files/%ef%80%a1%ef%80%a1FELL%20REPORT%20FINAL.pdf#overlay-context=news/food-education-learning-landscape-report>.

## **What would School Healthy Zones look like?**

The concept of schools as Healthy Zones could be the focus of an exciting national consultation convened as part of the next stage of the National Food Strategy, involving government departments, procurement and catering bodies, school leaders, governors, parents as well as engaging children and young people directly in the conversation. Some of our initial suggestions into this process include the following:

### **Healthy Food Served and Promoted**

- Revised, updated School Food Standards would be mandatory for all early years' settings and schools in receipt of government funding, including the 4,000 academies founded between 2010-2014, currently exempt. Mandatory Food Standards should also be adopted for all early years settings such as nurseries, where currently only voluntary standards apply.
- Restrictions on serving or selling sugary puddings, cakes, biscuits and all types of confectionery should apply across all times of day, consistently. Schools would be encouraged to extend policies on daily 'treats' and snacks into their social and fundraising events.
- Drinking Water to be freely available and the drink of choice in schools – no school to be selling bottled water, removing single use plastics and promoting healthy hydration. No child should be more than 100m from a source of drinking water, and water fountain provision in schools must be sufficient to reduce pupil queueing times to a minimum. A number of schools have already adopted Water only schools policies, and PHE London is shortly to publish a new toolkit for nursery, primary and secondary schools.
- A consistent emphasis on fresh fruit and vegetables throughout the school day, with an emphasis on ensuring local, seasonal and sustainability.
- Procurement of food for schools to be aligned with high quality standards, such as Food For Life, connecting health, local and sustainable food provision.
- Children are able and encouraged to sit down for a meal in a healthy, social environment supporting a good food culture during every school day.

### **Healthy Food & Nutrition Education**

- All primary pupils would have the opportunity to grow food (however small scale) and visit a farm or food production facility
- Qualified food and nutrition education teachers in every school, working to deliver stand-alone curriculum requirements on healthy food and cooking skills, as well as working across the school to integrate healthy food and nutrition across other curriculum subjects.

### **Healthy Food Accessible to all pupils regardless of background**

- Universal Infant School Meals to be extended to all Primary Years, and funded at a level that enables pupils to access healthy, nutritious meals.
- School meals to be extended to all secondary pupils in households classed as living in food insecurity.
- Stigma removed from 'Free School Meals' by rebranding as just School Meals or School Meal Provision/Allowance.
- The National School Breakfast Programme is currently reaching 1775 schools and serving 260,000 children (of whom 115,000 are in receipt of Pupil Premium), and should be continued and extended out to all areas where there are high levels of obesity and deprivation, building on the initial success of the current programme funded by £26m from the Soft Drinks Industry

Levy from 2018-20. An estimated 1.38 million children live in low income or out of work households affected by food insecurity.

### **Healthy Journeys to and from school**

- Improving licensing and planning powers for local authorities to progressively improve the quality and health of out of home food establishments and restrict direct sales to schoolchildren (see Sustain's separate submission on Licensing and Planning Powers for more details), as part of "Routing out Childhood Obesity" as recently suggested by the Royal Society for Public Health<sup>8</sup>.

### **Governance and Monitoring**

- Ensuring the design of any new schools supports good health, including sufficient cooking, dining and outdoor spaces where food growing can be integrated with the education provision, as recommended by NHS and PHE<sup>9</sup>.
- Headteachers and governors adopting a whole school approach to health and wellbeing
- Implementing a national Healthy Schools Ratings Scheme overseen by OFSTED or a new Children's Food Commissioner, mandatory for all nurseries and schools in receipt of public funding, covering food standards and nutrition education, as well as physical activity.

### **What does this big idea need to succeed?**

- Establishment of a new Children's Food Watchdog to co-ordinate a national process bringing together relevant government departments, regulators and agencies, the catering industry, school leaders, food teacher networks, local authorities, multi-academy trusts, and relevant educational, health or nutrition specialists to lead the establishment of a Healthy School Zones plan.
- Continued ring-fencing of income raised by the Soft Drinks Industry Levy for investment in a healthy pupils premium fund, and potentially further capital investments required by schools to improve nutrition education, kitchens and dining facilities, food growing, infrastructure improvement etc.
- Adequate investment in extended roll out of universal school meal provision for all primary and all eligible secondary pupils, to enable healthy food in line with the Eatwell plate, and adequate level of funding especially for schools with smaller pupil numbers.
- A national programme of school drinking fountains to fill the gaps in existing provision, which could be funded from income from the Soft Drinks Industry Levy. Plain milk/milk alternatives could complement free drinking water.
- Further revision of School Food Standards and amendments to existing legislation to bring all schools and early years settings into scope.
- A mandatory Healthy Schools Ratings Scheme to be integrated into existing local and national environmental health and OFSTED inspection processes, with a clear commitment to transparent reporting and publishing of data and ratings as part of overall assessment.
- Devolved powers to local authorities to address local planning processes

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rsph.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/19c7e03e-c36f-451f-9fd4fa257b771fb6.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/hip-2-design-deliver-manage.pdf>