

The Importance of a Good School Food Culture

Case Study: Hargrave Park Primary

Where did we start from?

Hargrave Park School serves a diverse community within an area of high deprivation in Islington; 78% of our children are entitled to a free school meal.

For some of our children their school lunch is their main meal of the day. A number of children who present poor progress rates are also those with attendance and punctuality issues. Some of these children also come to school without having had any breakfast. This lack of 'school readiness' is one of our biggest barriers.

Although the majority of children at our school have always taken up a free hot lunch (approximately 1 or 2 children per class bring a packed lunch), the quality of provision wasn't good enough. This impacted on the amount they were actually eating as well as the variety and suitability of their choice. This in turn impacted on their focus and behaviour in afternoon lessons and subsequently their progress measures.

Children did not appear to enjoy their lunch. Their choice often did not include many vegetables, fruit or salad. There was a vicious circle of children not eating salad or fruit, so the presentation of what was put out was not to standard; there was a culture of 'the children won't eat it so we won't put it out'.

In addition, the environment was poor. The school had a very large, ageing kitchen and poorly configured store area, but no designated dining area. The server counter, tables and chairs had to be put out daily in the assembly hall. The counter was not height appropriate, so the younger children could not see what the offer was.

What improvements have we made?

A full review of the catering contract was undertaken. Notice was given and a range of providers visited to understand more fully the vision for the improved lunch. The school council were involved in discussions about reconfiguring the kitchen and storage area.

This was funded by the school with the support of match funding from the local authority and a private donor.

The counter area is now attractively presented and lit. Food is not served from catering sized trays, but in family sized dishes.

Pupils are now vertically grouped in 'Houses', with siblings in the same house, enabling them to eat together and support the younger children. This has proved to be popular with families and has supported improvements in behaviour and the overall pastoral environment across lunch.



We launched a Universal FREE breakfast club in summer 2013, which is funded by Pupil Premium. Our new Breakfast Club now averages 35 to 40 students every day. Many of these children are those with attendance, punctuality and 'school readiness' barriers.

What impact has it had?

Children are eating more, both in terms of amount and variety. They are eating more vegetables, salad and fruit. Behaviour across break times and lunch is also much improved.

Although the school attendance figures are still a key priority and work is on-going, individual case studies demonstrate improvement.

