

## *The Importance of a Good School Food Culture*

### *Case Study: Dereham Neatherd*

#### *Increasing meal take-up by 40% through a whole school approach*

Through adopting the whole school approach, Dereham Neatherd has increased its school meal take-up from 20% to 60%. With strong leadership, proactive caterers, pupil and community involvement, alongside a fantastic cooking and growing culture, we have made a real difference to our school food culture.

But how have we done it?

#### *Strong leadership – making lunchtime a priority*

- The Head Teacher's school food policy has been signed off by the governing body and continues to give lunchtime a clear priority in the school day.
- Vulnerable pupils, including autistic children, are taken down to the canteen slightly earlier, in order for them to have a positive and calm dining experience.
- An early lunch has been used as a reward for some of our more challenging classes, a strategy which has impacted positively on behaviour and learning.
- Head Teacher Peter Devonish says, "Actions have taken the place of words and our Food for Life status is now central to the school's ethos".

#### *Pupil voice*

- The most significant change to impact pupils' dining experience has been the pupil-led changes to the canteen, all of which were a result of pupil surveys, School Nutrition Action Group discussions and a mini-conference of the School Council, canteen and site staff.
- The school magazine has a full page spread in every issue, featuring growing, cooking, recipe-making and apron-designing competitions, showcasing the huge number of people in the school community who 'Make a Positive Contribution'.

#### *Parents and community involvement*

- Many parents attended cooking competitions, such as the Chilli Cook-Off, where over 20 staff and pupils competed to be crowned best chef.
- By promoting healthy eating assemblies, organising whole school growing and cooking competitions and inviting parents in to the school on a regular basis, it is clear that pupils and their parents have been taking an interest and are now growing and cooking at home.



## *Growing*

- Every lunchtime, students take part in a gardening club, run an allotment, and plant edible borders with herbs, fruit and onions, to supply the school canteen, where an estimated 40% of the ingredients come from organic sources.
- Every year the school runs growing competitions, which involve vegetables being grown in every form room and office in the school (so far they have had chilli, pea, cucumber and tomato competitions).

## *The dining environment*

- A breakfast bar has been built and 20 bar stools purchased. With the addition of a pupil-chosen playlist for the new sound system, the canteen is a vibrant and healthy social hub of the school site.
- The school has purchased 20 picnic benches and constructed two covered outside dining areas for children who eat packed lunches or the canteen's 'Grab and Go' lunches. Uptake of school meals continues to rise: 550 meals per day + 110 'Grab and Go'. Free schools meals uptake is currently at 91%.
- The school has a designated budget to improve the displays in the canteen and aims to get pupils to research and design their own food provenance display.

