



# The School Food Plan

The School Food Plan was finally released on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2013. The plan has already prompted Government action to add cooking skills to the National Curriculum and the Government has in principle accepted many of its recommendations. Through APSE's role as the secretariat to the School Food All Party Parliamentary Group on School Food we have had the fortunate opportunity to question both the Education Minister Liz Truss and the report's authors, Henry Dimbleby & John Vincent, further to 'flesh out' some of the report detail and this briefing includes those clarifications .

## Key issues

- Head teachers are to be given the lead responsibility in school meal delivery.
- Aim to replace Nutritional standards with food based standards from September 2014. The standards will apply to new Academies but not existing.
- Compulsory cooking instruction up to the age of 14. A mixed approach is anticipated including the opportunity for suitably qualified existing cooks to deliver the tuition.
- Packed lunches discouraged but not banned as per initial headlines

## Introduction

The eagerly anticipated School Food Plan was finally released on 12<sup>th</sup> July with a list of recommendations for both Head Teachers and, Caterers and Government. You can download a copy of the 175 page School Food Plan from [www.schoolfoodplan.com](http://www.schoolfoodplan.com). APSE is proud to have been involved in the formation of this plan which cites APSE data and publications.

The Plan contains 16 actions to transform what children eat at school and how they learn about food. They include:

1. Put Food on the curriculum: making cooking and food an entitlement in key stages 1 to 3
  - Ensuring cooking is in the curriculum for all children up to the age of 14. The new curriculum will emphasise the importance of cooking nutritious, savoury dishes, understanding where food comes from, and taking pleasure in the creative arts of the kitchen.
2. **Introduce food-based standards for all schools**
  - The Department for Education will test and introduce a set of revised food based standards (built on a nutritional framework), with the intention of applying them to maintained schools and all new academies and free schools by September 2014.
3. Kick-start increased take-up of good school food

- A £16.1 million injection of cash from the Department for Education over the next 2 years. This includes £11.8 million that organisations such as the Children’s Food Trust and the Food For Life Partnership can bid for to help turn around schools that are struggling with their lunch service, £3.15 million to ensure healthy breakfasts are available for thousands of children who arrive at school hungry.
4. Set up financially self-sufficient breakfast clubs
    - a. Initial funding of £3.15 million – matched funding expected
  5. Set up flagship boroughs to demonstrate the impact of improving school food on a large scale
    - The launch of 2 flagship London boroughs to help prove that better school food can have a significant impact on children’s health and attainment. Every school in each area will receive co-ordinated support from expert organisations such as the Children’s Food Trust to improve the quality and take up of school meals and spread great food culture through the wider community. The Department for Education and the Mayor’s Office will jointly fund the boroughs.
  6. Investigate the case for extending free school meals entitlement
  7. Train head teachers: Include food and nutrition in head teacher training
  8. Public Health England will promote policies which improve children’s diets in schools
  9. Ofsted inspectors to consider behaviour and culture in the dining hall and the way a school promotes healthy lifestyles
  10. Measure success – set up and monitor five measures to test whether the School Food Plan is working
    1. Take-up of school lunches at primary and secondary schools
    2. Nutritional quality of what children eat - % schools meeting new food standard
    3. Morale of workforce
    4. Number of schools winning awards from FFLP or CFT
    5. Number of 16 year olds able to cook five savoury dishes
  11. Share ‘What Works Well’ on a new website, to enable schools to learn from each other
  12. Improve the image of school food
    - Co-founder of Innocent smoothies Richard Reed and branding expert Wally Olins will help devise a strategy to improve the image of school food, and Jamie Oliver has agreed to help through his media work.
  13. Bring school cooks closer to the rest of the catering sector
  14. Improve the skills of the workforce
    - a. Specific qualification for cooks
  15. Small school taskforce – caterers, kitchen designers and manufacturers to work together to provide good food for small school
  16. Ensure small schools are fairly funded
  17. Government should embark on a phased roll out of free school meals for all primary school children, beginning with the local authorities with the highest percentage of children already eligible for free school meals.

Actions for headteachers in the plan include:

- A practical checklist for headteachers, listing the most important things they or their team can do to that can make a big difference to take-up and food culture in schools. The checklist is based on the examples of what is working well that the reviewers have seen during their

trips to over 60 schools in the country. They are designed to be pinned up in the head's office and the kitchen. Suggested actions include:

- Lowering the price of school meals - consider subsidising school meals for your reception and year 7 classes for the first term, or offer discounts for parents of multiple children or those whose children eat a school lunch every day.
- Teachers should be encouraged to eat with the children in the dining hall.
- Have a stay-on-site rule for break and lunch time.
- Have a cashless payment system to shorten queuing times and prevent free school meal children from being stigmatised.
- Offer after school cooking lessons for parents with their children.
- Make sure packed lunches are not more exciting than school lunches. Ban sugary drinks, crisps and confectionery, or offer prizes and other incentives for bringing in a healthy lunch. Or ban packed lunches altogether.
- Watch what gets served at mid-morning break. Many children eat their main meal at this time which too often means filling up on pizza, paninis or cake.

### **Commentary**

Whilst much of the plan is aspirational, several points have already been accepted, including the inclusion of cooking within the curriculum and the explicit emphasis of the lunchtime experience within future Ofsted assessments.

Head-teachers will be responsible for delivery of the curriculum and will receive additional training in cooking. How the curriculum is delivered is however not prescriptive and cooking lessons could be delivered by teaching staff or via suitably trained catering staff including existing cooks

The Plan envisages the replacement of the Nutritional Standards by September 2014 with a Food Based standard. A similar approach has been adopted in the United States. Whilst the introduction of nutritional standards was deemed to be necessary several years ago, it is now regarded as being too restrictive and a food based alternative standard will be determined.

The requirement to adopt the current nutritionally based standards currently does not apply to Academies. The food based standard will apply to all existing state schools and new academies. Existing academies have contractual arrangements with the DfE which make inclusion within the current obligation problematic. Existing academies will be encouraged to adopt the standard and experience to date has been that the larger academy chains are keen to adopt them and it is anticipated that few will not.

One aspect that was highlighted was the support of the Secretary of State for Education for Universal free school meals. In what is seen as a significant change, Michael Gove supports the principle and its roll out starting at those places with the highest free school meal eligibility. There is cross party support for this position. The finance to do this is however unlikely in the immediate future.

Myles Bremner, CEO of Garden Organic will be funded to lead the plan over the next 2 years.

### **APSE Comment**

APSE welcomes the School Food Plan. As one of the organisations providing background information and whose performance networks data was quoted within the report, we are proud to be associated with the report and look forward to assisting in its implementation.

We welcome the opportunity for existing in-house catering staff to enhance their skills and teach youngsters to cook and the enhanced position of cooking within the curriculum. School uptake is highest where cooking staff are regarded as equal members of the school team and lunchtimes regarded as an important part of the school day.

We will press for the implementation of universal free school meals, believing it to be a valuable way to ensure school pupils achieve a balance diet and likely to save money in the longer term through improved health and reductions in obesity.

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