

Improving transparency and consistency in how schools monitor and report on school food

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Working definition: transparency and consistency in school food monitoring

In this presentation, improving transparency and consistency in school food monitoring and reporting means ensuring that information about the quality and compliance of school food is collected, assessed and reported in ways that are visible, comparable and trustworthy across schools, caterers and local authorities, and that reflect the whole-school food environment, not just the menu.

What is visible

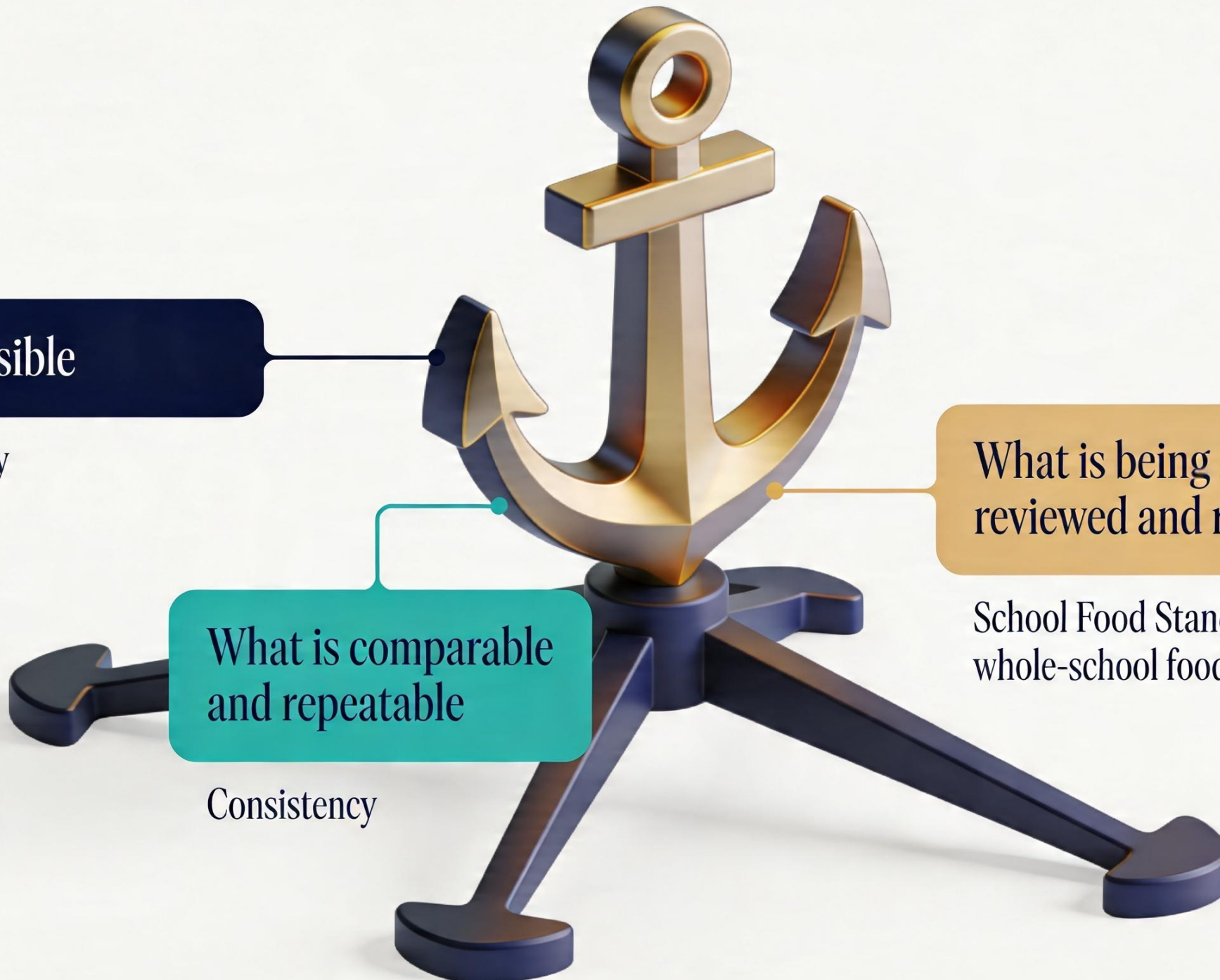
Transparency

**What is being monitored,
reviewed and reported**

School Food Standards +
whole-school food environment

**What is comparable
and repeatable**

Consistency



Monitoring school food in England: expectations and realities

Schools should demonstrate compliance with statutory School Food Standards through local oversight and evidence (DfE, 2023)



MANDATORY
STANDARDS



SHARED
RESPONSIBILITY



EVIDENCE OF
COMPLIANCE

What happens in practice?

Monitoring is often informal, relying on occasional menu reviews, contract meetings and ad hoc feedback.

Approaches vary between schools and local authorities, with limited routine, standardised checking.

Whole-school food approaches are encouraged, but tools for consistent school-level review remain limited and unevenly used

What the evidence shows

Multiple tools and frameworks have been developed

Schools have been offered different resources over time, including self-audit tools, policy checklists, school food environment frameworks and questionnaires.

These tools differ in purpose and scope

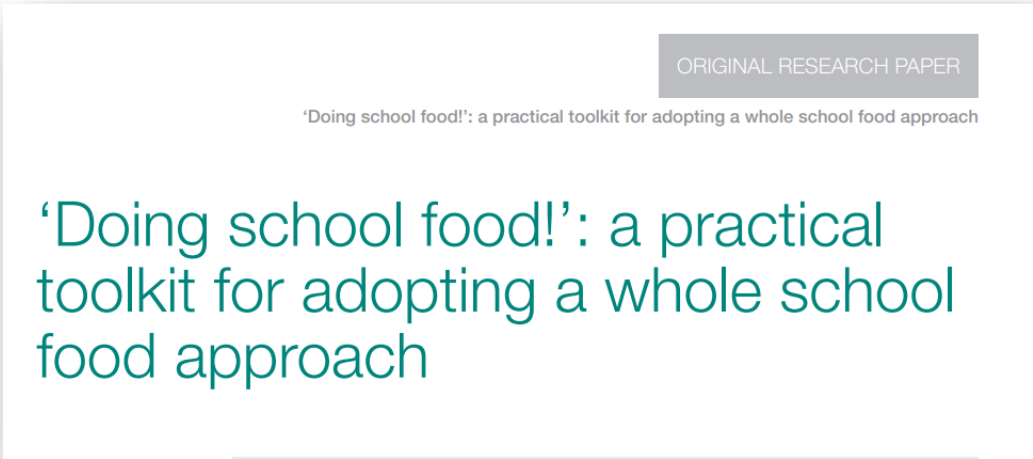
Existing tools vary in what they assess, from menu compliance and catering provision to policy, curriculum, ethos and the wider food environment.

A key gap remains at school level

No single tool is comprehensive or widely adopted. There is still no widely used primary-school self-audit tool in England that aligns with current School Food Standards and a whole-school food approach.



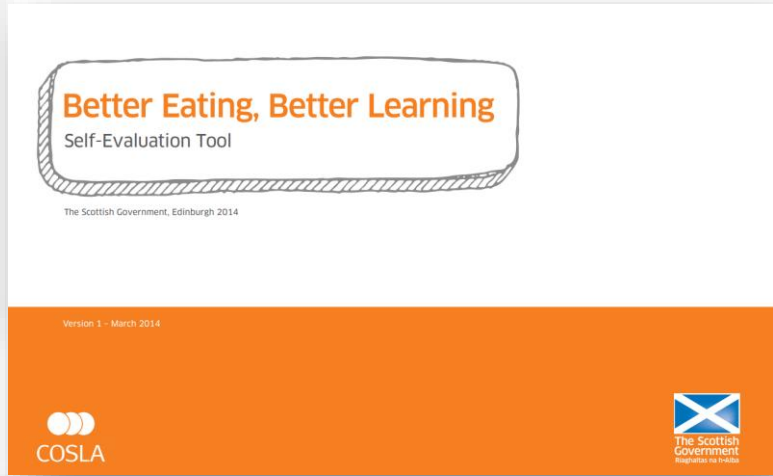
Food in Schools Assessment Tool – Food in Schools Partnership (c. 2007)



Doing school food!” whole-school food toolkit – Food Active (2023)



A structured **menu audit tool** developed to quantitatively and qualitatively assess school menus and price lists against school food standards and dietary guidance. Gives each school a “healthiness score” for its food provision.



A self-evaluation tool accompanying the *Better Eating, Better Learning* guidance, for schools, local authorities and caterers to review school food and drink provision and food education within a whole-school approach.

Swedish example: what structured monitoring can look like

Start Survey tool Frequently asked questions Good examples About us



Welcome to School Food Sweden!

We offer free support to schools and municipalities in Stockholm County for quality development of sustainable and healthy school meals - from a holistic perspective.

About the survey tool

How it works

Generate reports



Offer



Nutritional accuracy



Safe food



Environmental impact



Consumption and waste



Service and pedagogy



Organization and governance



Student dining survey

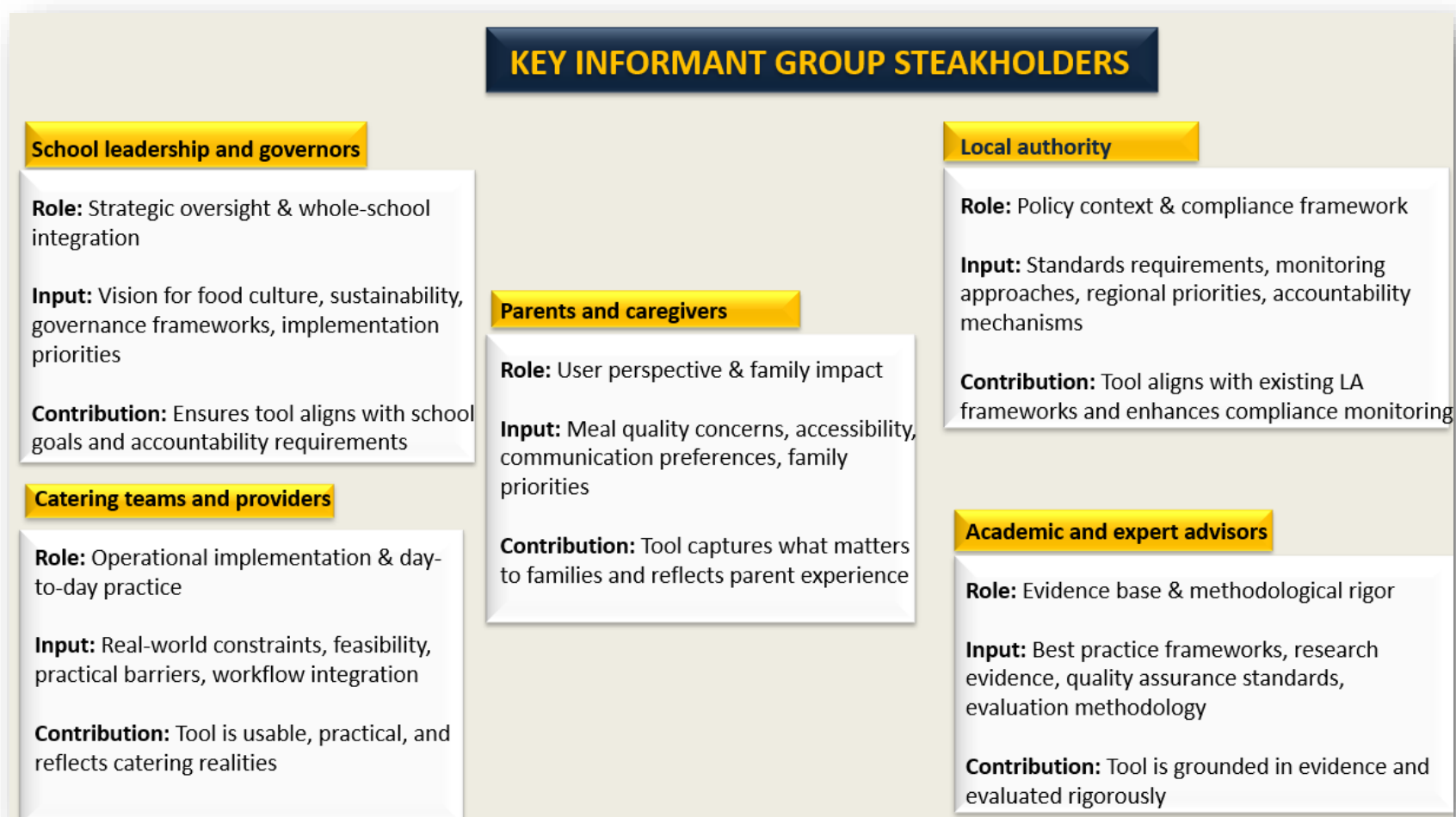


Staff diner survey

- ✓ Free, web-base
- ✓ Self evaluation instrument
- ✓ Measure and improve quality of school meals
- ✓ Target Areas: Covers food quality, dining environment, and the integration of school meals into pedagogical activities.
- ✓ Uses questionnaires to generate tailored, feedback, helping schools meet national guidelines.
- ✓ Impact: effectively improves the nutritional quality of school lunches, with better outcomes observed the more consistently the tool is used

Aim

To co-design and evaluate a school food reporting tool that supports state-funded primary schools in London to monitor the quality of food provision across the school day and to inform actions for improvement within a whole-school approach.



Developing a practical monitoring approach

Aligned to current standards and policy

The tool needs to reflect current School Food Standards and wider whole-school food priorities, not just menu compliance.

Designed for the UK primary-school context

It must fit the realities of busy primary schools, including limited time, variable staffing, and different catering arrangements.

Manageable in scope

It should be comprehensive enough to capture the wider school food environment, but simple enough to complete as part of routine self-evaluation.

Usable by different staff

The tool should be understandable and usable by school leaders, catering teams, governors and local authority partners, rather than relying on a single specialist.

Modular and adaptable

Different sections should be able to stand alone, so the tool can be updated if policy changes and used flexibly across schools.

Clear in purpose and guidance

Schools need unambiguous instructions, rating criteria and examples of evidence, so monitoring is more consistent and less open to interpretation.

What outputs and functions should the tool provide?

Collect information in a consistent way

So that schools are reviewing the same core domains and generating comparable information.

Make evidence visible

The tool should help schools show what they are doing well, where gaps remain, and what evidence supports their position.

Provide feedback at school and local authority level

Outputs should be useful both for school self-review and for wider local oversight or support.

Support action planning

The tool should not stop at scoring; it should point users toward priorities for improvement and next steps.

Link to resources and guidance

Findings should connect directly to practical resources or recommendations that help schools improve.

Generate user-friendly reporting outputs

Results should be easy to understand and share, for example through summaries, dashboards, traffic lights or action-focused reports.

Next steps: from evidence to tool development

- Needs assessment survey
- Integrated analysis of survey and review findings
- Blueprint design for the self-audit and reporting tool
- Stakeholder refinement and preparation for piloting

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