

ASK THE EXPERT: HEALTHY EATING

CAN SCHOOLS REALLY INFLUENCE THE FOOD CHOICES YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE? TWO TEACHERS SEEK SOME PROFESSIONAL ADVICE ON ISSUES OF NUTRITION...

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I work at an academy in the North East of England, serving a relatively deprived catchment area. We recently changed catering companies, following justified concerns about the quality and range of food on offer from our previous supplier. There is no doubt that our canteen now provides lunches and snacks that are delicious as well as healthy... but the take up of school meals amongst students has not only failed to improve, it's actually dropped a little. The SLT agrees that it would be foolish to bring back more 'junk' food simply in order to get the numbers up, but at the same time, it's frustrating to see learners bringing in rubbish when they could benefit so much from a nutritious, well balanced (and, for a large percentage, free) meal in the middle of the day. Any advice on how to tempt teenagers into the canteen without relying on pizza and chips with everything?



Laura Sharp, nutritionist at the Children's Food Trust, says:

A It really is important academies provide food and drink that is compliant with the School Food Standards.

There is increasing evidence that the food on offer in schools, and food selected by pupils for their lunch is healthier than before these standards were introduced, and we

know eating a healthy lunch in a decent environment has a positive impact on learning behaviour in the classroom after lunch.

It can take time to change eating behaviour so it's important to persevere and provide encouragement and support to pupils to try new foods. One way to get pupils more enthusiastic about school meals is to give them a voice. Use your school council to consult with their peers about the menus and dining rooms to find out why they are not choosing school meals. For example, why not ask pupils to help revamp your menus by voting on their favourite dishes, (you can get lots of free recipes on the Children's Food Trust website, childrensfoodtrust.org.uk)? There are lots of ideas and guidance in our School Council Toolkit 'Work up an Appetite for Change' available for free in our online shop. Many schools have also successfully used meal deals to encourage pupils to choose a complete, nutritionally balanced meal by providing a combination of menu items at a cheaper price than when sold separately. Meal deals can include hot set meals, such as a roast dinner and apple crumble, or grab-and-go items such as filled jacket potatoes, fruit pot and milk.

By promoting healthy eating and good nutrition in their schools we know academies will see the benefits in the improved health and wellbeing of their pupils.

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As a parent, I am delighted that cooking is to be a compulsory element of the KS3 curriculum from September 2014... but as a teacher of D&T in a small secondary school, I'm absolutely terrified! I'm comfortable covering nutrition, healthy choices and so on... but actual, practical kitchen skills really aren't part of my repertoire. My head teacher has promised me all the support I need – budget permitting – so what is the quickest, easiest and most affordable way to get my CPD appropriately up to scratch in this area?



Maggie Sims, head of Let's Get Cooking for the Children's Food Trust says:

A Here at the Children's Food Trust, like you, we're delighted to see specific requirements for children to cook

and learn about nutrition in the new National Curriculum in England. If you're feeling daunted at the prospect, don't worry. If there's one thing we know from our Let's Get Cooking programme, it's that it can be fun and easy to cook with children in all sorts of places with just a bit of basic kit and simple recipes.

We would recommend using online CPD training to help you get your skills up to speed. They offer a convenient method by which you can learn at a time and place that suits you. Some of the quickest and most affordable courses are through the Children's Food Trust Learning Network (learningnetwork.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk) and there are two courses you will find particularly helpful:

'How to run practical cooking clubs' explains how to develop food preparation and handling skills, increase awareness of food safety and hygiene and understand different approaches to managing cooking groups. It also covers how to choose recipes for your cooking sessions and increase knowledge of equipment and ingredient requirements for group cooking sessions.

The second course, 'Planning cooking activities for different audiences' offers step-by-step information and activities to understand the importance of careful planning to ensure practical cooking sessions are successful. Find out more at learningnetwork.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/mod/page/view.php?id=113.

