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# Healthy eating in schools

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**Better  
education  
and care**

This report is Ofsted's response to the increasing public concern about the quality of children's diets and rapidly increasing rates of child obesity. It assesses how schools have responded to guidance on school meals and healthier eating. Its findings are based on a small scale survey of primary and secondary schools made in preparation for a major survey of food in schools to be carried out in 2006/07. Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools were accompanied by nutritionists appointed by the Food Standards Agency. Additional evidence was gathered from school inspection reports.

**Of particular interest to:  
schools, school meal caterers and providers, parents, carers, local  
authorities, DfES.**

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**Age group**  
Primary and secondary

**Published**  
March 2006

**Reference no.**  
HMI 2625

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Document reference number: HMI 2625

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## Executive summary

This report is Ofsted's response to the increasing public concern about the quality of children's diets, rapidly increasing rates of child obesity and diet-related diseases, and low consumption of fruit and vegetables by children.

As preparation for a major survey of food in schools to be carried out in 2006/07, Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI), accompanied by nutritionists appointed by the Food Standards Agency (FSA), undertook a small scale survey, including visits to 10 schools from clusters of primary and secondary schools in three local authorities. Additional evidence was gathered from over 50 reports of school inspections that had been conducted under the new framework for inspection, from reports on personal, social and health education (PSHE) and from reports on schools visited as part of a survey on learners' health and well-being.<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise stated, when proportions of schools are referred to in the report, they apply to this wider evidence base.

The report assesses how schools have responded to guidance on school meals and healthier eating. It uses case studies as examples of how schools have improved pupils' healthier eating and the quality of school meals.

The media have shown a great deal of interest in the quality of school meals, particularly in the last 12 months. Many adults, as well as children, have been shocked to discover how some popular meat dishes have been made. For some families, but by no means all, these revelations have changed their shopping and eating habits.

Schools have a key role to play, but it is not as significant as that of parents. We must recognise that no matter what a school offers through breakfast clubs, snacks and lunches, the significant majority of children's food and nutrient intake comes from home. Parents have the foremost responsibility to monitor their children's diet and weight and influence their eating habits and lifestyles. Parents also control the amount of money a child has to spend, and have a responsibility to influence the choices their children make.

School lunches remain a key element of food consumption in schools. Under the right conditions, school meals provide an opportunity to encourage pupils to eat more fruit and vegetables, and to develop a taste for food that is low in salt, sugar and fat. Many parents decide that their children should take a packed lunch to school. The majority of schools visited had yet to start to work with parents to seek to influence the content of packed lunches.

In a minority of the schools inspected for this survey the standard of school meals had slowly improved, although the rate of improvement was more rapid

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<sup>1</sup> The report on the survey of health and well-being will be published by Ofsted in summer 2006.

in primary schools than in secondary schools. In the primary schools visited, pupils were developing, and using, the necessary skills to make informed choices about healthier meals. By comparison, secondary school students did not always apply their knowledge when making meal selections. The quality of the environment in which pupils ate their lunches, and the advice available to them on making healthier choices, were good in most primary schools but less so in secondary schools.

Schools are also being urged to consider the food offered throughout the school day to ensure that it reflects the messages about healthier eating in the curriculum. The majority of schools providing breakfast ensured that the food and drink available were consistent with an overall healthier diet. Providing fruit daily at break times for the youngest children had been a success and an increasing number of primary schools were providing this for all their pupils. However, in the majority of secondary schools, students could still purchase food from vending machines, and these sometimes contained products that did not promote healthier eating.

In primary and secondary schools, teaching about healthier eating was often good. Consequently, pupils' knowledge and understanding of healthier foods, and of a healthier diet, were at least adequate and often good. In primary schools, pupils had the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to make informed choices regarding healthier meals. In secondary schools, opportunities for students to link their work in different subjects to improve their understanding of healthier foods were less frequent.

Most headteachers recognised that in order to adopt a coherent approach to healthier eating they needed to develop a policy towards food. However, only a minority of schools had done so. A school's healthier eating policy was most effective when it was the result of full consultation with teaching and non-teaching staff, school cooks/caterers, pupils, parents, governors and local authority representatives.

Many catering services monitored and evaluated the take-up of school meals. Although the evaluations were normally shared with the schools, it was unclear how much of this information was acted on. However, a minority of the schools, in their efforts to ensure the health and well-being of their pupils, had made good progress in managing healthier eating.

The report recommends that school and catering staff should have up-to-date factual information, support and training to enable them to understand fully key concepts, such as 'healthier foods' and 'nutritional standards'. All schools should have a food policy, although they will require help to make best use of all the advice on offer. They should consider how they can involve pupils and their parents more closely in the decisions taken about food; and they should work closely with catering managers to monitor and evaluate both the quality of school meals and the approach to healthier eating. Secondary schools with very

short lunch breaks should consider whether students and staff have enough time to eat their food properly and derive social benefits from eating together.

## Key findings

- ❑ In a minority of schools the standard of school meals had improved. The rate of improvement was more rapid in primary schools than in secondary schools.
- ❑ The quality of the environment in which pupils ate their lunches was good or better in most of the primary schools, but it was not always of such good quality in secondary schools.
- ❑ Schools recognised how to promote healthier eating habits among their pupils, but not all were successful in helping them to make appropriate choices.
- ❑ Most catering services monitored and evaluated the take-up of school meals, but schools did not always make full use of these data.
- ❑ Schools were working hard to ensure that pupils taking a free school meal could do so without this being known to other pupils.
- ❑ In primary and secondary schools, pupils' knowledge and understanding of healthier foods, and of a healthier diet, were at least adequate and often good.
- ❑ In primary schools, pupils had opportunities to develop and use the skills necessary to make informed choices about healthier meals. In secondary schools, a significant minority of students did not apply their knowledge when making meal selections.
- ❑ Teaching about healthier eating was often good or better. Cross-curricular links were not as well developed and good practice was not always disseminated as well in secondary schools as in primary schools.
- ❑ Despite the wide range of advice given to schools, there was much confusion over key terms such as 'healthier foods' and 'nutritional standards'.
- ❑ Only a minority of schools had a whole-school policy on food. The extent to which schools involved pupils and their parents in developing such policies was better in primary schools.
- ❑ In the schools visited, the new criteria for the National Healthy Schools Standard were beginning to make a difference to schools' planning for healthier lifestyles.<sup>2</sup>
- ❑ Schools and governors were not always aware of the requirements placed on them following the Education Act 1996,
- ❑ In the schools visited, there had been little or no recent training for teaching or non-teaching staff relating to healthier eating.

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<sup>2</sup> *National healthy school status: a guide for schools*, Department of Health, 2005.

## Recommendations

1. The following recommendation for national bodies arises from this survey:
  - School and catering staff need up-to-date factual information, support and training to enable them to fully understand key concepts such as 'healthier foods' and 'nutritional standards'.
2. The following recommendations for schools arise from this survey:
  - Secondary schools with very short lunch breaks should evaluate their meal provision to consider, in particular, whether pupils and staff have enough time to eat their food properly in pleasant surroundings that allow them to experience the social benefits of eating together.
  - All schools should have a food policy. Many schools, particularly small primary schools, will require help to make best use of all the advice on offer and to produce a food policy.
  - Schools should consider how they can involve pupils and their parents more closely in the decisions taken about food in their schools.
  - Schools should work closely with catering managers to monitor and evaluate the quality of school meals and the approach to healthier eating.

## Context

3. Two government White Papers on public health raised concerns about children's diet and led to the launch of a number of initiatives aimed at influencing school children.
  - The National Healthy Schools Standard (NHSS), part of the National Healthy Schools Programme, seeks to promote key areas of activity in 'healthy schools', including healthier eating.<sup>3</sup>
  - In 2000, the National School Fruit Scheme became part of the National Health Service (NHS) plan for investment and reform of the health services.
  - In 2001, a new Public Service Agreement (PSA) target involving three government departments – the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department of Health (DH) – committed these departments to achieving a halt by 2010 to the year-on-year increase in the prevalence of obesity in children under 11. In April 2001, nutritional standards based on food groups were reintroduced in schools.
  - The White Paper, 'Choosing Health', published in 2004, was closely followed by a Food and Health action plan. These outlined the government's vision that half of all schools would be 'healthy schools'

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<sup>3</sup> *National healthy school status: a guide for schools*, Department of Health, 2005.

by 2006, with the rest working towards healthy school status by 2009.<sup>4,5</sup>

- The DH and DfES launched the Food in Schools programme to assist schools across England in implementing a whole-school approach to healthier eating and drinking.
- In 2005 the DfES, the DH, the FSA and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) published the Healthy Living Blueprint for Schools. Together, the 2004 White Paper and the 'Blueprint' involved firm commitments to:
  - revise the standards for primary and secondary school meals
  - strongly consider introducing nutrient-based standards and, subject to legislation, to extend new standards to cover food served in school across the school day in secondary schools
  - work with industry and sector skill bodies to provide better training and support for catering staff working in schools.
- In March 2005, the DfES announced a number of measures to improve food in schools, including the provision of training for school catering staff in healthier eating, and the inclusion of school food in the Ofsted inspection programme. At this point, the secretary of state for education announced the formation of the School Meals Review Panel and, shortly afterwards, the DfES produced draft guidance for headteachers and governors on procuring a school meals service.<sup>6</sup>

## School meals

### The standard of school meals

4. Despite the wide range of advice given to schools, there was often confusion over key terms such as 'healthier foods' and 'nutritional standards'.<sup>7</sup> For the purpose of this report, a healthier diet is taken to mean:
  - a balanced diet with plenty of variety
  - a diet which provides enough energy for satisfactory growth and development
  - plenty of fruit and vegetables
  - plenty of iron rich foods
  - plenty of calcium rich foods
  - not having sugary foods and drinks too often

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<sup>4</sup> White Paper: *Making healthy choices easier*, Department of Health, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> *Choosing a better diet: a food and health action plan*, Department of Health, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> See details at [www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/healthyliving/foodanddrink](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/healthyliving/foodanddrink)

<sup>7</sup> Specific information on nutritional requirements for pupils of different ages is provided in *The committee on the Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA) Report: Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the United Kingdom*, London, HMSO, 1991.

- not having too many fatty foods
  - not having too much salt.
5. Most schools visited for this survey regarded school lunches as a key area for improvement because they provided an opportunity to reinforce messages about healthier eating from the classroom. They recognised that school meals contribute to a child's food and nutrient intake; they could encourage children to eat more fruit and vegetables and to develop a taste for food low in salt, sugar and fat. In these schools, improving the range of healthier options led to increased take up of school meals. Proportionately more primary pupils took a school meal than secondary pupils.

### **Good provision**

6. In a minority of schools the standard of school meals had improved. The factors that most commonly contributed to this were:
- meals cooked on the school site
  - menus planned well in advance and shared with pupils and their parents, who submitted orders for meals on some/all days
  - locally sourced fresh produce used in the preparation of school meals
  - fruit always served and a choice of at least two vegetables
  - water freely available for pupils
  - a gradually increasing range of food served to pupils
  - limited access to some foods, such as chips
  - themed days to increase the take-up of meals and imaginative attempts to encourage pupils to eat school meals
  - encouragement from cooks and lunchtime supervisors to pupils to sample new foods and eat all their meal, whether a school meal or a packed lunch, and guidance provided if poor selections are made
  - in nearly all cases, good provision for pupils with special dietary needs.

### **Poor provision**

7. Not all pupils had access to good quality school meals. In a significant minority of schools, a number of factors had a negative impact on the quality.
- No on-site cooking facilities. This was particularly a problem for primary schools. If cooked meals were delivered to the schools, they could be lukewarm when served and appeared less than appetising to the pupils.
  - A lack of consistent support for pupils in making informed healthier choices.

- No formal monitoring of healthier eating, which meant that schools could not build on good practice or intervene to eradicate poor practice.
  - A very low take-up of school meals, which limited the further development of healthier choices.
  - A lack of opportunity for pupils and their parents to opt in to the schools meals system as they wished, preventing pupils from sampling meals more frequently or eating them on days when parents knew they liked a particular meal.
8. An increasing number of schools, most often primary schools, were aware that improving the standard of school meals was only part of a broader whole-school approach to ensuring pupils' health and well-being. In these schools, all food and drink had to comply with the higher standards being expected of school meals, as in the following example.

***Extract from an inspector's notebook***

*The cook of this primary school currently has 60p per day to pay for all food ingredients. The decision was taken to move to locally sourced vegetables and fruit from organic suppliers.*

*She instigated a survey of parents and pupils to determine each pupil's likes and dislikes, as well as to identify any related allergies or pupils' particular dietary needs.*

*She produced, in advance, a full weekly menu that was circulated to parents and pupils. Pupils were encouraged to make their selections, with the opportunity to have a school meal on each day of the week or only on particular days, according to their own choices.*

*Meals have become increasingly adventurous with theme days proving to be very popular. One day each week is a 'picnic day'. This contains hot and cold foods but there is no set meal. In the summer, the picnic is taken out to the school grounds where staff and pupils eat lunch together.*

*The cook has also been responsible for changes to the serving arrangements. All meals are now served directly to each pupil rather than set out in advance. While airline-style trays are used for pupils in Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 pupils are given plates and dishes for their lunch.*

*This has proved very popular with the pupils.*

*When selecting foods, pupils are encouraged to try new selections and are allowed to sample. There has been an increased take-up of a wider range of vegetables. On most days, at least three different vegetables are available. There is usually at least one cooked dessert, while fresh fruit is always available.*

*The increased match of provision to pupils' tastes has led to a dramatic reduction in the amount of wasted food.*

9. Secondary schools also recognised the importance of school meals in their overall strategy to ensure pupils adopted a healthier lifestyle. Schools should work closely with pupils and their parents in developing a policy about food and drink. A headteacher said to inspectors:

*The school has a whole-school approach to encouraging pupils to adopt healthier lifestyles. We have worked closely with pupils, parents and staff to develop our strategy for improving lifestyles.*

*Part of this is to ensure best practice in providing food and drink throughout the school day. Breakfast, break and lunch selections are coordinated to ensure that pupils cannot select the same food dishes in more than one meal each day. This has broadened the range of dishes that pupils select and has led to increased consumption of fruit and vegetables.*

10. In most of the secondary schools included in this survey, a significant number of pupils did not eat breakfast. This had the potential to affect the balance and variety of their daily diet and also had an impact on their ability to settle in the mornings and their readiness to learn. To tackle this, some schools offered a breakfast of healthier foods.
11. A small minority of schools provided tuck shops and vending machines that offered healthier options such as natural fruit juices, dried fruit, bread rolls, soup, fresh fruit and vegetables. Other schools, through their vending machines, continued to offer foods which were high in salt and sugar, and high-sugar drinks; this contradicted the messages about healthier eating that they were trying to communicate elsewhere.

## **The quality of the dining experience**

12. The quality of the environment in which pupils ate their lunches was good or better in most of the primary schools, but was not always so in secondary schools.

### ***Extract from an inspector's notebook***

*The primary school dining area is a pleasant space. Tables and chairs are colourful and bright. Pupils are encouraged to talk in a quiet voice and consistent 'good table' behaviour is rewarded by the table hosting a large fabric stuffed toy in the shape of a red tomato. Pupils are expected to be mature and thoughtful, and tables comprise mixed classes and year groups. Pupils talk well together and all pupils are included in conversations. They enjoy eating in the canteen. Packed lunches are eaten alongside the school meals, so that all pupils are included in the lunch activities.*

*Tables are kept clean. This contributes to an environment which is conducive to a pleasurable meal. The dining area is used only for meals and rarely as an additional teaching space, so none of the lunchtime is taken up with moving furniture.*

13. In secondary schools, the dining accommodation and the conditions under which pupils ate their lunches were variable and, at times, poor. A minority of schools had such short lunch breaks that pupils and staff had

too little time to eat their food in pleasant surroundings. As a result, they lost the social benefits of eating together. Catering staff and supervisors did not have the time to guide pupils to healthier food options. In extreme cases, pupils bought their meals from the dining area, but had to eat them, including some hot meals, elsewhere.

14. Not all secondary school dining conditions were so poor. In one school, the inspection report had highlighted the poor dining facilities and the school had responded positively by enhancing the provision.

***Extract from an inspector's notebook***

*Students are well received in the dining areas. The dining room is quite small, but the space is used extremely well. Students are encouraged to eat in the designated areas and the overwhelming majority do so.*

*Improvements to the range and quality of the meals have led to increased levels of use of the dining areas by staff and students.*

*Students, whether taking a school meal or eating a packed lunch, eat together, making lunch a pleasant, social experience. Behaviour at lunch time is excellent. There is little litter.*

15. In a majority of schools, a recent but highly beneficial development was the availability of water, not only during the lunch break but throughout the day. In the best cases, schools encouraged pupils to have their own water bottle and hence maintained good standards of hygiene.

## **Helping pupils and parents to make healthier choices**

16. Most schools recognised the important contribution they could make to promoting healthier eating habits in their pupils. However, few schools succeeded in ensuring that pupils were supported in making appropriate choices. One primary school used the 'School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme' as a stimulus to revise practice. The headteacher said:

*When the scheme was introduced for Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 pupils, the school took the opportunity to reassess its policy on healthier eating and drinking. Following a full consultation with parents, we decided to make radical changes to what children could eat and drink at playtimes. Previously, they could bring in more or less what they wanted, with crisps, sweets and chocolate bars being very common.*

*With fruit being provided for the younger pupils, we decided to extend this to Key Stage 2 as well and said that they could eat only fruit at playtimes. At the same time, we agreed that only water or milk would be available at playtimes and that pupils would have access to water throughout the day. Although there was some resistance from a minority of parents, the changes have been implemented successfully and pupils are enjoying a wider range of fruits and vegetables at all meal times.*

17. Pupils in primary schools were supported well when making appropriate choices of food at lunchtime and were more likely than secondary school pupils to be encouraged to sample new foods before making their final choice.

***Extract from an inspector's notebook***

*The midday supervisor distributes stickers for those pupils who have chosen to eat a healthier lunch. The contents of pupils' packed lunch boxes are also scrutinised and award stickers are presented to pupils who meet the required standards.*

18. Students in secondary schools were less well served. Few received the support they might have needed to make healthier choices. Speedy service in very short lunch breaks gave cooks and supervisors too little time to influence students' choices. This was not helped by poorly displayed advice on healthier eating. Menus were not prominently displayed in the school, or in dining areas, preventing students from having the time to consider their meal selection. Other schools had adapted their serving arrangements effectively so that students could view the entire range of healthier options before making their selections.
19. An increasing number of schools – mainly primary schools – shared their menus in advance with pupils and their parents. Most frequently, the menus were sent home a month in advance, with the healthier eating options highlighted. Schools which shared their menus with pupils and allowed them to elect to take meals when they wished saw a significant increase in the numbers taking school meals.
20. However, children have most of their meals at home and it is here where the greatest influence on a child's diet is likely to be seen. Parents have a responsibility to make sure that they know what sort of food their children need for their day to day activities and to do their best to meet these needs. There are many sources of information for parents to learn more about children's dietary needs.
21. Few schools had given advice to parents to help them to provide a healthier packed lunch for their children. Where they had done so, primary schools which monitored packed lunches were able to raise any concerns directly with parents. As a result, they saw a marked improvement in the quality, so that it provided a key part of a healthier diet.
22. Schools had established ways of working with others to promote the health and well-being of pupils. One headteacher reported:

*The school nurse takes a very active role in the life of many pupils. As well as carrying out routine checks on all pupils, she provides support and training for parents and staff. The sessions have helped to further parents'*

*knowledge regarding healthier eating and have helped to raise awareness regarding many health and safety issues.*

23. Other schools worked with community health staff to promote healthier living for parents, such as courses for parents on food and nutrition skills and weekly keep-fit sessions for women.

## **Educating pupils about healthier eating**

### **Developing pupils' knowledge and personal skills**

24. In primary and secondary schools, pupils' knowledge and understanding of healthier foods and of a healthier diet were at least adequate and often good.
25. In primary schools, through work in the curriculum and through 'circle time' discussions, pupils had the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to make informed choices regarding healthier meals.

#### ***Extract from an inspector's notebook***

*Throughout the school, pupils have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy diet. Their selections from the school meals provision and the range of foods within their lunch boxes reflect good application of their knowledge of healthier foods.*

*The school has promoted the move towards healthier food. It has worked with parents to ensure that they appreciate healthier options, in packed lunches as well as school meals.*

26. Most primary school pupils had opportunities to develop their social and personal skills.

#### ***Extract from an inspector's notebook***

*Pupils' table manners are very good. Although they use airline-style trays throughout, the school has organised a system that encourages proper eating. From the Reception year onwards, pupils are encouraged to place the tray on the table, so that their main meal is facing towards them.*

*When they have eaten the main meal, they are asked to seek permission before they turn the tray round to eat their dessert. This system works extremely well and enables the lunchtime supervisors to monitor whether pupils are eating their meals properly.*

*The monitoring of lunchboxes has ensured that pupils are eating appropriately and are also eating everything that their parents have provided.*

27. In secondary schools, opportunities for students to link their work in different subjects to improve their understanding of healthier foods were less frequent. Of more concern in the majority of schools was the scarcity of advice when students were making food choices. As a result, a

significant minority of students did not apply their knowledge when choosing their meal.

28. For a variety of reasons, including a lack of seating space, school meals were provided under conditions similar to commercial 'fast food' outlets, with insufficient adult supervision. As a result, students did not always have the chance to develop their social and personal skills further or to make healthier eating choices.
29. When pupils had a good knowledge of healthier eating, they made a valuable contribution to the debate about improving the standard of food in schools. Although school councils were often involved, greater success was achieved if the school established a separate food group.

***Extract from an inspector's notebook***

*The School Nutrition Action Group at this girls' school was concerned that school meals, amongst other things, did not meet the dietary needs of all pupils and that only a limited range of dishes were offered.*

*The group met the school and local authority caterers to discuss their concerns. The range of meals offered now meets the needs of all students, with a choice of hot meals available throughout the lunch period.*

30. Schools worked hard to ensure that pupils who were eligible to have a free school meal could do so without it being known to other pupils. An increasing number of secondary schools had introduced a 'cashless' system, which dealt with this problem and also allowed the school and parents to monitor what pupils were eating.

## **Teaching about healthier eating**

31. Teaching about healthier eating arose in a number of subjects. In primary schools, the quality of the planning and teaching of this cross-curricular work was often at least good: core themes were explored appropriately. In secondary schools, teaching about healthier eating was often good in food technology lessons, health and social care, PSHE and science. It was planned effectively to support and underpin healthier eating. But, unlike primary schools, secondary schools did not develop cross-curricular links so well and opportunities were missed to exploit good practice fully.
32. Increasingly, a range of professionals supported teachers. In one primary school, the cook had undertaken a course so that she could teach aspects of food preparation to all year groups in a way that supported learning in other subjects as well as contributing to pupils' understanding of healthier eating.
33. In an increasing number of secondary schools, an appropriate range of health professionals supported the teaching of health and social care and

PSHE. As a result, pupils enjoyed these courses and found them relevant, for instance in their coverage of such issues as eating disorders.

## Planning the curriculum

34. Most headteachers recognised that in order to adopt a coherent approach to healthier eating, they needed to develop a policy towards food in their schools. Only a minority of schools, however, had such a policy. Schools were not reluctant to develop these policies and had been given a great deal of helpful advice on all aspects of food in schools. However, the extent of the advice offered had posed difficulties for some schools. In particular, small schools did not have the time or staff resources to respond to all the advice offered and to produce a whole-school food policy based on consultations with pupils, parents and staff.
35. Many schools were developing a policy in parts. For example, a majority of primary schools did not allow chocolate, sweets and fizzy drinks in school. A small minority of secondary schools included in this survey prevented pupils from leaving the school in the lunch break, so that they could more readily engage with them on selecting healthier food options.
36. A school's healthier eating policy was most effective when it was the result of full consultation with teaching and non-teaching staff, school cooks/caterers, pupils, parents, governors and local authority representatives.
37. The aims of a school's food policy should be to improve health and well-being, equip pupils to make informed choices about food throughout their lives, and ensure equal access for all.<sup>8</sup> It should be part of the school's improvement plan to ensure that training is funded appropriately and that other resource needs are met. The policy should bring together all aspects of food in the school to give coherence, clarity and consistency. It should
  - state clearly its aims, objectives and success criteria
  - affect all aspects of food provision, for example breakfast clubs, tuck shops, school lunches, vending machines, fluid consumption and use of food as a reward
  - include the consumption of food, the eating environment, service style, time, litter, pupils' own food brought to school, packed lunches (including information to parents) and commercial food vending vans
  - ensure that the lunch break experience contributes positively to the pupils' personal development, including the seating and queuing arrangements

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<sup>8</sup> For advice to governors see

<http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2005/nov/schoolgovernors>

- underpin the formal curriculum through subjects such as food technology, science, PSHE and citizenship
  - include pastoral care and welfare issues, for example behaviour and free school lunches
  - include extra curricular activities, for example cookery clubs and school gardens
  - provide clear guidance relating to participation in national events and initiatives, such as the National School Fruit Scheme and the National Healthy School Standard
  - include events and lettings at school, for example a school fête.
38. Most primary schools had identified a subject coordinator to lead the planning. Where this happened, it ensured good links between planning and teaching aspects of healthier eating. In many secondary schools, promoting healthier eating occurred throughout the school but, when no one teacher had responsibility for this, opportunities were missed for the school to extend and build on its good practice.
39. Good practice was observed in some secondary schools.

***Extract from an inspector's notebook***

*The curriculum provision in relation to food and healthier eating is very good. Awareness of how it is taught across the curriculum is being extended to include a greater understanding of how the work will be taught and what outcomes are expected.*

*In science, healthier eating and nutrition are covered well in a coherent and progressive manner. The provision in design and technology (food) has changed at Key Stage 4, where GCSE catering has replaced food technology. The course is proving to be more popular and incorporates a basic food hygiene qualification that all pupils achieve at the start of the Year 10 course. All pupils participate in two weeks' work experience as part of the course. Links with local restaurants and hotels are very good. PSHE and physical education (PE) also contribute effectively to pupils' understanding of a healthier lifestyle and the need for a balanced diet. PE teachers are now included in discussions on school food so that snack choices for sports and matches can be included in the school food policy.*

40. The new criteria for the National Healthy Schools Standard were beginning to have an impact on schools' planning. The importance of healthier lifestyles and the place of food in schools provided a framework against which schools were able to plan their whole-school policy and provision.

## **Managing the approach to healthier eating**

41. Many catering services monitored and evaluated the take-up of school meals. Although the evaluations were normally shared with the schools, it

was unclear how much of this information was acted on. A minority of the schools, in their efforts to ensure the health and well-being of their pupils, had made good progress in managing healthier eating.

***Extract from an inspector's notebook***

*The school has clear, well written policies on meals and healthier eating which have influenced the development of very good practice. The use of surveys has ensured that parents and pupils have been involved in monitoring and evaluating the provision.*

*The headteacher has given the cook very good support, not only in terms of developing healthier meals but also in ensuring the availability of training. This has enabled the cook to support teaching and learning about food and food preparation.*

42. Other schools had worked extremely well with catering services to ensure that the wishes of pupils, their parents and the staff were properly addressed. In some cases, this had resulted in the sourcing of meat and vegetables from local suppliers, often from companies dealing in organic produce.

43. Some secondary schools had identified ways to influence the take-up of healthier foods by reviewing the way that students paid for their meals and snacks. One catering manager told inspectors:

*In our school, we have introduced 'cashless' catering. This has allowed students, parents and staff to monitor more closely, and at an individual level, what is eaten at breaks and lunchtimes. Kitchens have opened at break, selling only healthier options such as soup, rolls and toast. The range of hot meals, salads, baguettes and sandwiches at lunchtime has been widened. As a result, pupils' expenditure in local shops has plummeted.*

*Currently, the school is changing the food and drinks available in vending machines, with healthier options subsidised for an introductory period.*

44. Communication with pupils, their parents and the staff was improving. School councils and surveys offered them opportunities to comment on school food. Comments were communicated to the school food group, governors and catering staff.
45. Schools and governors were not always aware of the requirements placed on them, following changes to the Education Act 1996. Governors should:
- establish a clear strategy for catering, ensuring that catering requirements are clearly identified in the school development plan
  - set clear financial and performance objectives for catering, deciding whether the service should be run at a profit or be subsidised
  - set out clear charging policies for meals linked to the financial objectives for the catering service.

46. Governors are also responsible for all health and safety issues, and for matters related to food hygiene. They are required to provide free lunches to qualifying pupils whose parents request them. However, the local authority is responsible for repairing and maintaining equipment, and has to ensure that catering facilities comply with health and hygiene standards.
47. In the schools visited, there had been little or no recent training for teaching or non-teaching staff relating to healthier eating. Even when training had been provided there had been a lack of guidance on the impact it was supposed to have on the individual and on the school.

## Notes

In December 2005, Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI), accompanied by nutritionists appointed by the FSA, visited 10 schools from clusters of primary and secondary schools in three local authorities. Additional evidence was gathered from over 50 reports of school inspections that had been conducted between September and December 2005 under the new framework for inspection, as well as from reports on personal, social and health education (PSHE) and from reports on schools visited as part of the 2005/06 survey on learners' health and well-being. Unless otherwise stated, when proportions of schools are referred to in the report, they apply to this wider evidence base.

## Further information

[www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk](http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk)

This is the website for the National Healthy Schools Programme.

[www.foodinschools.org.uk](http://www.foodinschools.org.uk)

This supports the work of Healthy Schools in all aspects of food in schools.

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/schoollunches/default.shtml>

This gives information about the compulsory nutritional standards for school lunches.