



All-Party Parliamentary Group School Food

Position Paper for Packed Lunch Standards Framework



June 2016

This paper is the collective thoughts from a range of experts who advise the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on School Food.

It is the fourth publication from the group that identifies a school food-related issue, makes key points, sign posts to further information, gives a view and makes recommendations to address the inequality seen between school food standards and the lack of standards regarding packed lunches.

This paper aims to generate debate towards healthier packed lunches becoming the norm in our school dining halls, as part of a holistic approach to tackling childhood obesity in the lead-up to the Government's pending Childhood Obesity Strategy.

Background

The current school food legislation only considers food provided by schools, excluding packed lunches brought from home, when looking at how healthy it is for a child. Yet, evidence has shown that only 1% of packed lunches taken into school met the school food standards and were more likely to provide double the recommended fat, sugar and salt intake and below recommended nutrient levels and 80% had no vegetables.ⁱ

This is why one of the key aims of the School Food Plan was to move children away from packed lunches to school meals to address the health issues around packed lunches, but also to improve the viability of the school meal service.

With a burgeoning childhood obesity crisis facing the country, with one in five children in reception classed as overweight or obese and rising to one in three by the time they reach Year 6 this can be put off no longer.ⁱⁱ There is no silver bullet to tackling childhood obesity, that is why there is a real need to look at children's food consumption in the round and the food children eat during the school day, whether provided by the school or brought in from home.

This is supported by the recent report by the Health Select Committee; Childhood Obesity; Brave and Bold Action, which stated: 'that clear nutritional guidelines should be published setting out food standards recommended for packed lunches as well as food supplied by schools'.ⁱⁱⁱ

There are also concerns that children from low socio-economic backgrounds can be disproportionately represented amongst children affected by obesity, diet-related diseases and dental health, and are more

likely to be on packed lunches if not entitled to free school meals. Figure 1 below illustrates the number of children eating school meals according to their socio-economic demographic, showing those families who are just above the poverty line (and thus not entitled to FSM) are more likely to choose a packed lunch for their children.^{iv}

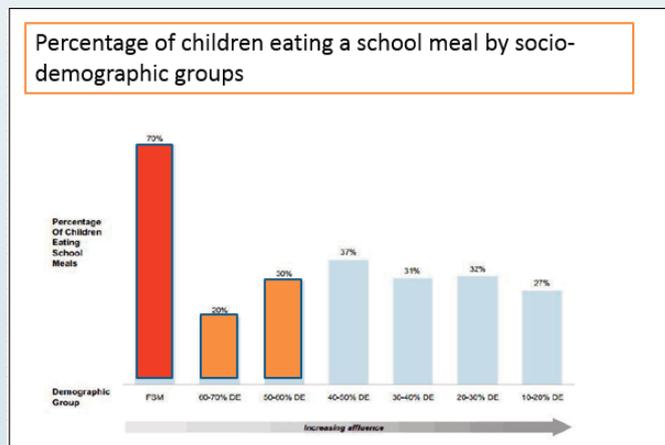


Figure 1 Percentage of children eating a school meal by socio-demographics (SFP 2013 Pg. 116).^v

Making a hot and healthy school meal the norm for children to eat during the school day is priority, however, it needs to be recognised that many children still choose to eat a packed lunch and are falling under the radar of school food standards that aim to improve the health of children.

This is seen in data from the January 2015 school census which shows that 15.6% of the total population of pupils in primary school are eligible for FSM, yet only 13.5% take up the offer.^{vi} The School Food Plan estimates that 30% of primary school pupils pay for a school meal.^{vii} These figures suggest that of approximately 2,500,000 key stage 2 pupils, about 1,400,000 (56.5%) have a lunch (packed lunch or other) not covered by school food standards.

These facts show there is a need for action to be taken to improve the nutritional quality of packed lunches. Some schools have already begun to do this. Head teachers are often reluctant to implement such policies as to avoid conflict with parents fearing being seen as 'a policy maker' or 'dictator'; despite their welcoming of government policy that supports the 'whole school approach' to food^{viii}. A recent survey^{ix} by Taylor Shaw, a school meal catering provider, found that 90% of head teachers welcomed support to encourage families to send their children to school with a healthier packed lunch which was aligned with the new school food standards.^x

However, there is a growing acceptance that parents have a role to play in improving their child's diet, as seen in the Government's Healthy Weight Healthy Lives report which states that families want to do what is right for their families but give in to their child's food choices for a harmonious household.^{xi} Evidence on tension between families was seen in a case study in Leeds in 2008, which showed pupils having a school lunch felt aggrieved by the disparity between standards.^{xii} As one child said: "It's unfair they can eat chocolate in their packed lunches I have to have my free school meal".

Ofsted has shown an on-going commitment to promoting the health and wellbeing of students and now have a measure (under Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare) which looks at how schools can, and must, support pupils' learning to keep themselves healthy – including through healthy eating.

Recommendation

Based on the burgeoning childhood obesity crisis facing the country, and the growing acceptance amongst head teachers and parents to introduce a clear packed lunch standard framework, the APPG recommends that the Government:

- Considers the introduction of a holistic non-mandatory packed lunch standards framework, based on the current school food standards, which restricts foods high in fat, sugar and salt and promotes healthier affordable choices for all and do this by consulting with head teachers, unions, parents and children and young people.

- This policy should not seek to be a direct translation of the current school food standards as this could disengage head teachers, instead it should advocate a 'softer' framework that aims to restrict certain foods and reflect the style of the former School Food Plan Office's resources.

- It's not about developing a punitive policy or making head teachers and dining room supervisors or the catering sector the 'food police'. Instead it's about supporting public health policy that is fair, practical, accessible and affordable for everyone.

The APPG also believes providing resources to parents and schools, or raising awareness of already existing resources, on a healthy, affordable packed lunch, such as example menus and recipes, would be beneficial to the 'whole school approach' to food as a way of helping address family tensions and conflicts.

References

- i <http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/School-Food-Plan-Evidence-Pack-July-2013-Final.pdf> Rogers, Cade, Evans (2007) et al Pg. 16
- ii https://www.noo.org.uk/slide_sets
- iii http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmhealth/465/46511.htm#_idTextAnchor066
- iv http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/School_Food_Plan_2013.pdf
- v http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/School_Food_Plan_2013.pdf
- vi <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2015>
- viii Cargo, M. Salsberg, J. Delormier, T. Desrosiers, S. Macaulay, A. (2005) Understanding the social context of school health promotion program implementation. *Health Education*. 106: (2) 85-97
- ix Herbert, D. (2000) School Choice in the Local Environment: headteachers as gatekeepers on an uneven playing Journal of *School Leadership & Management*, 20, (1): 79-97.
- x Report available from rosie.molinari@taylorshaw.com or tel. 07912784496 Strategic Public Health Manager for Taylor Shaw
- xi http://www.nhs.uk/change4life/supporter-resources/downloads/consumer_insight.pdf
- xii Report available from rosie.molinari@taylorshaw.com tel. no. 07912784496 Strategic Public Health Manager for Taylor Shaw

Photographs SOURCE: Gatenby, LA (2011) Children's nutritional intake as part of the Eat Well Do Well scheme in Kingston-upon-Hull – a pilot study. *Nutrition Bulletin*. 36 87-94.



Leeds Case Study:

In 2008, Leeds City Council led a city-wide packed lunch policy consultation engaging children, young people their families, headteachers, health professionals & councillors to investigate the needs for a city-wide packed lunch policy. The following summarise key stakeholder opinions.

Headteacher opinion

Of the 109 Head teachers that responded 92 (84%), said they agreed and would welcome the policy to support their health ethos. Concerns related to parent reaction and requested tailored support for families on what constitutes a healthy school meal. They agreed the policy should not be mandatory, and requested high-level publicity to inform and prepare pupils and parents for change.

"We anticipate a few issues to start with, but eventually pupils and parents will conform, same as the School Uniform policy."

Headteacher

Pupil opinion

Pupils agreed it was only fair that packed lunch pupils should eat healthily - the same as those having school meals. They said if done inappropriately it could cause bullying and discrimination of pupils and expressed the need for support for children from low-income families who are not entitled to free school meals; recognising that there would be some resistance at first from pupils and parents, but felt after time that they would get used to it.

"Its unfair students can eat chocolate in their packed lunch but we can't buy from the school." **Secondary school pupil**

Parent opinion

Parents agreed saying the standards for school food were necessary, and that it was unfair that packed lunch eaters were not restricted to the same standards. Their concerns tended to focus on monitoring and affordability and would welcome advice.

"It's one less argument" **Parent**

Catering opinion

All 9 catering providers to the 260 schools in Leeds welcomed the policy. Collective concerns focused on monitoring and importance of promoting a hot school meal and monitoring.

"Must not discourage uptake of school meals."
Catering Manager

Policy outcome

These findings informed the Leeds Packed Lunch policy toolkit and guide setting out 6 key steps for implementation in consultation with pupils and families. A free copy of the original Packed Lunch Policy Guidance Frameworks and a toolkit on 'how to' create a policy are available here:

<http://www.cornwallhealthyschools.org/documents/packed%20lunch%20policy%20guidance%20EL.pdf>

<http://www.cornwallhealthyschools.org/documents/packed%20lunch%20toolkit.pdf>

Sample comments by Head teachers in response to the policy facilitated by a Clinical Programme Manager for Paediatric Dietitian (Childhood Obesity) in Manchester:

"These families often struggle to provide three meals a day, especially in the school holidays and are frequent recipients of our food bank vouchers. The packed lunches are low on a nutritional and calorific level just due to affordability."

"There would need to be an investment in skilling parents up to meet a set of guidelines rather than just setting rules."