

Food, Glorious Food!



St Helena's is a small rural Primary School with 112 children on roll and has had a dream of it's own school kitchen for many years. This dream actually came true in April 2013 and is the jewel in our crown!

The development and success of our kitchen truly is due to involving the whole school community, thus giving ownership of the project and putting the children at the centre of the provision. Enthusiasm for healthy, locally sourced, delicious and nutritious meals has been fantastic, dispelling all pre-conceived ideas and memories of school dinners from long ago! No soggy cabbage or lumpy custard in our kitchen!!! Parents and children were involved in fundraising, menu development and most importantly the appointment of our fantastic Cook!

The installation of a new kitchen from scratch, in the space of 3 cupboards may have seemed a somewhat daunting prospect! However, with the right expertise and enthusiasm, the impossible was brought to fruition in approximately 10 weeks - much to the surprise of the contractors, who constantly reminded us that it is the smallest commercial kitchen they had ever fitted! Work was carried out during term time, but with no loss of the school hall.

Our small kitchen has a capacity to produce approximately 100-120 meals per day and we are currently running at an average daily take up of 65% - our break even point being 45%. Our Cook is employed for 30 hours per week and there are 2 Midday Supervisors who help to serve and wash up.

We have a three-week rolling menu with the choice of a main meal or jacket potato plus

dessert or fruit each day. Food is wholesome and well presented. Parents/children select their menu choices, which are handed into the school office for the term and then parents pay for the days that meals are required. We have found that having our own kitchen has given us greater flexibility in cancelling meals for absent children, providing meals for those who have forgotten their lunch and also being able to offer visitors and staff a meal. We can also alter our lunchtimes to fit in with school visits/swimming sessions etc.

Here are some of the best bits about having our own kitchen:

Quality control of meals;

Control of ingredients used - fresh food sourced locally;

Control of cost/price (we charge £2 per meal);

No transport costs;

Increased Free School Meal take up = increased Pupil Premium funding;

Cookies and flapjack on special occasions/cakes for the class with best weekly attendance;

Food grown by the children used in school dinners;

Fantastic facility for attracting new families;

Increased concentration levels for the afternoon sessions!

Delicious smells wafting around school!

The new kitchen has improved the whole dining experience for our children by introducing simple but effective measures such as replacing plastic cutlery and crockery with stainless cutlery and ceramic plates and bowls, using tablecloths and giving those who still prefer a packed lunch a plate to put their food on.

The kitchen has also been a brilliant link with our local community who we invite in to school once a month for a meal, which also aids the kitchen's sustainability. The Christmas Community lunch was a fantastic event full of the festive spirit and awe and wonder for the adults as they were entertained with Christmas songs from the children!

Parents/grandparents are also invited to come and join their child/ren for lunch at any time, which has helped to increase attendance for those children who may take a day off when Grandma and Grandad visit!

The only possible negative for our school kitchen that we may admit too, is that all the staff put on weight in the first six months; but we just love the flapjack, and the cheesecake, and the chocolate sponge, oh and the apple crumble.....

Our school kitchen has been a fantastic addition in many ways and has brought far more to our school dynamic than we could have ever wished for. Universal free school meals for under eights is a fantastic opportunity for us to develop our kitchen further for the benefit of more of our children and families.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to come and have a look at what is possible in a small space!

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