

School food: serving up high standards

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Greetland Academy cooks more than 1,000 meals a day, all meeting the new food standards. It supplies 6 local primaries with dinners, has a gardening club run jointly with parents, and has held a farmers' market selling the pupils' produce.

Headteacher Amanda Bennett explains how the West Yorkshire school works with pupils, parents and other schools to provide high quality meals and food education cost effectively.

We converted to an academy as an outstanding school in 2011. But we had developed a collaborative approach to the provision of schools meals in our local area more than 10 years ago.

As a split-site school with serving kitchens at both sites, we were well placed to develop an independent catering provision and produced a business plan.



Feeling of ownership

We liaised with local catering firms and set up a collaborative network of local schools with whom we developed menus, delivery services, costs and promotions.

We started an ongoing engagement with our pupils regarding menu planning and catering delivery as we needed to hear their choices and likes. These can change quickly and so require us to amend our offer to ensure their continued buy-in.

Recently popular requests have included fruit smoothies and chicken baps. As a result we have been well placed to be ahead of expectations, both at our school and externally.

This has resulted in pride in and a feeling of ownership of our school meals amongst our children and the catering teams.

1,000 meals a day

With the advent of Universal Free School Meals (UFISM) in September 2014, we carried out a full catering audit in the spring term of the same year. This was to ensure we were prepared for the increase in uptake and able to embrace the new school food standards.

There were some tight deadlines but we have been successfully producing 40% more meals since last September and keeping customers happy.

Our catering teams now prepare more than 1,000 meals a day, all meeting the new food standards. We efficiently manage our evolved collaborative approach supplying 6 local primary and pre-school settings with dinners, and working with them to continuously improve our service.



Getting involved

At Greetland the whole school dietary ethos relates to all school food from breakfast club, through to lunch as well as healthy snacks at breaktimes.

Our curriculum is based around 'inspirational experiences' and this embraces healthy school food; getting everyone involved from growing their food through to its preparation, cooking and eating.



Our catering team are encouraged to get involved in food education activities most recently advising the gardening club on their choice of vegetables to grow, through to using our school garden potatoes and carrots in our cottage pie.

Our catering manager and business manager work to increase the take-up of school meal and free school meals.

They consult with pupils and parents on lunch choices, encouraging pupils to suggest improvements to the dining experience. They also carry out project work contributing to positive changes in school food culture.

During the Diamond Jubilee celebrations the children designed picnic meals resulting in diamond shaped coronation chicken and cucumber sandwiches.



Cooking curriculum

Our established cooking curriculum is a key part of a whole-school approach to healthy eating with staff and children trained in the safe use of equipment.

Most recently our year 3 children reported in our bi-annual celebration booklet that they had used the correct 'bridging' cutting technique when making their Stone Age smoothies.

These high standards have enabled us to both work with and contribute to the Food for Life, Phunky Foods, Active Kids and Change4Life programmes.

Together this continues to ensure we deliver healthy eating lessons plans alongside appropriate physical activity lessons.

Community

As a national support school and teaching School our staff:

- contribute to various forums and working groups
- provide venues to disseminate good practice
- celebrate successful lessons and share these with others through the use of video

Our developments have naturally progressed to include the local community including parents who actively support our greenhouse and vegetable growing clubs throughout the year. They often share information from their jobs and professions in support of our topics.

Our adult evening learning cookery classes have been a great success in our kitchens and training rooms. They are based around the theme 'healthy meals to cook in 20 minutes'.

And wherever possible we use local suppliers. Our local milk man transports our meals and the local butcher and fruit and vegetable wholesalers both work closely with us.



Healthy progress

Our school council meets regularly and food is always high on their agenda; my very first school council meeting 12 years ago had a request for tomato ketchup on all tables and more chips.

Since then a continuous reinforcement of good eating habits alongside an active engagement in growing and preparing our own food has resulted in a successful request for salad bars and more meals made with our own produce.

Our pupils now have a real passion for and enjoyment of good food. The UIFSM initiative has seen a 98% uptake of school lunches at our key stage 1 site. Feedback praises our freshly prepared meals, seasonal changes and ability to cater for all dietary needs.

Our farmers' market which took place in the summer was a great success, with local produce on sale including some grown and prepared by our children.

Parents preferred this to the traditional summer fair as it added good health and provenance to a traditional mix of fun and games. It also engaged pupils in local enterprise.

Successfully growing

The Greetland Academy has signed up for the 'What Works Well' campaign to share our experiences with other schools.

We advise schools to take time to discover, meet and work with their local suppliers, providers and families to provide bespoke school meals and food education.

In our experience, exploring needs, deepening interests and developing enthusiasm does result in positive reactions all beneficial to a drive to improve whole school provision.

