



**SCHOOL
FOOD
MATTERS**

**FARM
GATE TO
SCHOOL
PLATE**

Good reasons to get rid of those prison trays

Given all the challenges that Heads face as they get to grips with improving school meals, aren't prison trays the least of their worries? Here are some good reasons why those prison trays need to go:

They are horrible to eat from. The small compartments make it impossible to use knives and forks correctly. This encourages children to eat with their hands. We shouldn't be making it harder for children to learn table manners.

Being confronted by your pudding and your main course at the same time can be very off-putting. Children complain constantly about getting gravy in their custard.. Some young children can be tempted to eat their pudding first and to leave their main course altogether.

It creates an expectation that feeding children is simply about convenience. Pile it all on one tray and go. Its association is with TV dinners, on the move AND prison - all negative images that shouldn't become the everyday norm.

Its use supports the myth that there is adult food and there is children's food. It is no co-incidence that the rise in fussy eating has been accompanied by the development of so-called children's food products – often high fat, lacking in fruit and veg, shaped to look like fun objects. The development of trays to replace plates can be seen as part of that trend.

There is no reason why children can't be shown how use a plate, a knife and a fork. Despite fears from lunchtime staff, young children take only a couple of days to adapt when trays are replaced with plates. Catering staff report that although the number of items to be washed up increases, it's actually easier and quicker to wash plates and bowls than trays with all those nooks and crannies.

If not now – when? There are always going to be hard decisions to be made with competing priorities. Planning to replace trays sends the clearest message that you value a pleasant dining experience with good table manners and a civilised environment.

Convenience Although it may be deemed more convenient for schools to use prison trays, convenience is no justification. It was an over-dependence on convenience foods that contributed to the decline in standards of school meals in the first place.

The School Food Plan and Universal Infant Free School Meals offers a new beginning and a huge step on the road to a Golden Age in school food. Start your journey with plates and bowls and say goodbye to the prison trays!

With special thanks to Jackie Schneider of Merton Parents for Better Food in Schools