



'Adventurous attitude to food' wins Norfolk Infant School 'best school food project' Award

Lodge Lane Infant School and their caterers Norse Commercial Services were recently triumphant in the **'best school food project'** category at the Norfolk Food and Drinks Awards. They submitted a joint application which impressed the judges, highlighting their work with parents and the community, promoting cooking and growing activities taking place in the school and the nutritious, freshly prepared healthy meals enjoyed daily by pupils.

Judges said: *"The winning school has shown a true commitment across the whole school to use every opportunity to develop understanding of food production and cookery and to link diet to health. The work done has an impact across the curriculum and into the community."*

According to Head Teacher Andy Tovell, *"gaining the prestigious Silver FFLP Award in February this year has been integral to our success in the Norfolk Food and Drink Awards today"*. When first applying for the **'best school food project'** award, the school focused on how food and school cooking was promoted. The judges however also became interested in how the school had collaborated with their caterer to educate children about the importance of healthy eating and trying new foods, as well as where their food comes from.

In their application, Lodge Lane said that ensuring children develop a good understanding and attitude towards healthy eating was very important to them, stating that school meals play a pivotal role in achieving this. They went on to say that the Food for Life Partnership has certainly increased interest and awareness in food throughout the school and accordingly there is *"an adventurous attitude towards food now, which never existed before"*.

All children have the opportunity to garden, with every class helping to plan what they would like to grow on an annual basis. They look after and harvest the vegetables and use it for specific food projects, such as themed weeks as well as linking the measurement of home-grown veg to the maths curriculum. The school

is constantly looking to develop community allotments and with time, hope for the produce to be cooked in the school kitchens.

Community involvement is integral to the school's values. Three times a year parents and community members are invited to join pupils for a school meal which are hugely popular events. 'Family learning days' for grandparents, siblings and parents allowed them to make healthy snacks and enjoy them in them in and enjoy them in a healthy eating café, sharing a relaxed and positive dining experience with the children. After a 'Families to Lunch' week, one parent said, *"another fabulous meal. Thank you again. I have seen a great improvement in my son's eating. A lot of this has come from the work you are doing at the school."* Themed days often lead to a considerable school dinner uptake, with 80-90% of the school participating.

The Head Teacher believes the children are benefiting from the superior food quality and ingredients used by Norse, who have been awarded the Silver Food for Life Catering Mark. Catering Manager, Karen Willimott who has worked at the school for 17 years confirmed, *"we have certainly raised standards and the quality of the food is excellent. The meat we use, for example, is fantastic and parents really notice that when they come and dine with us. As far as the healthy eating message is concerned, we are 'catching them young' here – so most don't know any different. Eating healthily therefore comes very naturally."*

Norse Commercial Services provide thousands of Norfolk schools with locally sourced, freshly prepared and sustainable meals and are using this effective model to increase school meal take-up across the county, putting healthier eating firmly on the timetable.

Daily lunch staff and the Head Teacher work side-by-side in the dining hall, actively encouraging pupils to try new foods and stretching their perceptions. As Norse Account Manager, Melanie Large summarises, *"youngsters at Lodge Lane have truly embraced the importance of eating fresh, wholesome and quality food, and the whole Food for Life culture is clearly making a real difference – every day."*

The recently published School Food Plan talks about the importance of strong leadership and increasing school meal take-up and it is clear that Lodge Lane Infants and Norse, by working together, have forged a strong relationship, with food at the heart of its success.

