

Oasis Academy South Bank and Cookability C.I.C. Supermarkets helping schools teach children how to cook



Changes to the national curriculum now make learning how to cook, and prepare healthy meals, compulsory for all children up to age 14. As schools across the country meet the new challenge, an innovative programme recently trialled in Lambeth is helping schools access a novel source of support: supermarkets.

Oasis Academy South Bank (OASB) teaches 120 year 7 pupils each week how to cook and eat well. OASB delivers Gastronomy in their core curriculum for all children and Master Chef as part of their enrichment programme. Cookability have supported OASB to secure food supplies from local supermarkets. **Cookability** is a London-based social enterprise that teaches young people how to cook and make good decisions about what to eat. Cookability uses its networks with supermarkets to secure food supplies for OASB from local stores, including The Co-operative Food and Tesco to provide a sustainable supply of ingredients.

Carly Mitchell, principal at OASB, shares ideas on how to create a great food culture, and Cookability founder Michael Davies gives tips on setting up partnerships with food businesses in your community.



Principal Carly Mitchell

Oasis Academy South Bank (OASB) is a new secondary school serving the Waterloo community in central London. Besides valuing a strong partnership between school and the local community, OASB puts food, cooking and eating well at the centre of school life.

All year 7 students at the academy attend a weekly Gastronomy course that explores the art and science of food and cooking. Principal Carly Mitchell leads the way in creating a great food culture at Oasis, and teaches a Master Chef class each week to pupils.

"Healthy eating and creating a love of the eating experience is part of our aim to raise cultural and social capital," explains Carly.

Regarding the innovative Ingredients-for-learning programme, Carly notes that "Cookability have ensured we have the ingredients we need to teach our children to cook exciting, creative and innovative dishes."

Carly Mitchell's tips for creating a great school food culture

- **Family dining.** "We enjoy family style dining each day where our young people sit together, serve one another and enjoy the feeling of 'family'."
- **Community lunches.** "Friday is our Community Lunch day where we open the doors to the local residential and local corporate communities, and welcome them to join our students who engage them in conversation over lunch."
- **Master Chef.** Carly also teaches this weekly class introducing cooking skills and new recipes to 18 pupils who dive in and create a nourishing dish in under an hour.
- **Feeding others.** Year 7 students baked scones and prepared afternoon tea, which they brought round to local seniors living in sheltered accommodations, and joined them in games of bingo.
- **Weekday Sunday roast.** Another food-and-community event, this series of traditional Sunday roast meals were cooked by students and served to families, friends and neighbours over a series of weekday evenings in the school cafeteria.



Founder Michael Davies

Cookability founder Michael Davies developed and pitched the **Ingredients-for-learning** programme to local supermarkets, and got them to donate food to support Oasis Academy's cooking programme. Using a social media strategy, he made the school's programme accessible to the community (<http://facebook.com/CookabilityNow>), and provided the stores with valuable PR.

"For many schools, affording food for their cooking programmes can be prohibitive — and of course, cutting back on ingredients is a serious barrier to learning how to cook."

"Partnering with local food businesses in the community can help provide schools with a steady supply of ingredients for teaching pupils how to cook. With this support, schools can focus on teaching practical food skills, and delivering excellent cooking programmes."

Cookability's 6 Tips for partnering with food businesses

- 1. Extend your cooking classroom into the community.** Food and learning are powerful ways to bring people together. Sharing aspects of your cooking programme with the community (including local businesses) is a great way to connect and open up channels of support for your school. The Ingredients-for-learning programme, and Oasis Academy's brilliant food and community events, provide examples that schools can easily adapt and benefit from.
- 2. Keep your pitch simple, and emphasise benefits.** Most food businesses in your community will be in favour of food education, so you'll be operating at an advantage when asking them for their support. Practice a short elevator speech that describes your programme's objectives, material needs and feature 2-3 clear benefits that would be created by their donations. Summarise this in a short, printed presentation and leave it with the manager. This will gain their confidence, and make it easy for them to sell the idea to their superiors.
- 3. Engage regularly with your sponsors.** Once you've agreed the terms of their sponsorship, stop by the store to thank staff and managers, and celebrate with a simple kick-off meeting. Invite them to attend or volunteer at your school's cooking programme. Offer to keep sponsors updated using social media, and regularly acknowledge their support to the community using posts, tweets, great photos and short videos.
- 4. Create a simple social media strategy.** Social media is a powerful tool for sharing information, and can be a lot of fun to use. However, without a clear strategy, generating content can swallow up considerable staff time and creative energy without achieving your goals. Start by defining your social objectives (e.g., Engage the community's interest in food and healthy eating). Next, identify your audience(s) needs (e.g., Family and neighbours want to see what pupils are learning about food, and supermarkets need to be recognised for their support). Outlining a strategy will keep a focus on priority tasks and provide ways of measuring success.
- 5. Appoint a social media champion.** Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google+, provide free tools for sharing what pupils are learning with your community and business sponsors. These applications have become easier to learn and use, but each has its own options for sharing your content and managing privacy. Tap your staff's talents and enthusiasm and appoint a social media champion who can help define practical procedures and policy (and reward them by adding this to their professional development plan).
- 6. Establish a regular pulse of communications.** Your school's cooking programme can provide an endless source of great content to engage your community — from delicious pictures of food and healthy recipes to "good news stories" about local businesses that sponsor food education. The trick is to find the right frequency of posts and tweets, and keep it regular. Excessive posts and updates can cause your audience's attention to drift; and communicating too infrequently or irregularly can flatline vital interest in what your programme and pupils are achieving. Experiment, and find what works well for you.

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