

Catering at St. Aidan's Church of England High School, Harrogate

St. Aidan's is a Church of England high school, located in Harrogate, North Yorkshire with approximately 2000 on roll.

In 1999 the St. Aidan's Leadership Group decided to improve the catering provision at the school. In 2001, after months of work and research, we terminated the contract with the county caterers, and embarked upon a recruitment process to appoint a Catering Manager. The interview comprised of both a verbal and a practical session, where the candidates were tasked with producing a nutritious meal appealing to a teenager for £5. We successfully appointed a skilled Chef who had considerable experience in commercial catering. He brought with him a wealth of knowledge, having already established excellent relationships with local suppliers, he ensured only the highest quality of produce was delivered to the school each day. He also appointed a team of chefs and catering assistants, who shared his passion for good food and a belief that all students were valued customers.



In 2000 - 2001 the county caterers served an average of 250 meals per day. Up to 1,000 pupils used the open gate policy to walk to the nearest food outlets, the remainder of our students brought packed lunches. The St. Aidan's catering enterprise now serves an average of 1,800 meals per day and currently employs 6 commercially trained Chefs, a Baker, a Dietitian, 23 Catering Assistants, an Administration Assistant and a Gardener to maintain the fruit and vegetable garden. The garden is a valuable educational tool within the curriculum, utilised by the Science, Geography and Food Technology departments.



We now have an on-site policy, except for 6th Form students, but even the majority of these students choose to eat at school – they have two dedicated eating areas, one of which provides a variety of hot and cold food options throughout the day. Year 7 and Year 11 also have their own dedicated dining facilities and Years 8 – 10 have a restaurant which serves a variety of hot and cold meals, sandwiches and soups.

We have noticed a marked improvement in the students' behaviour in an afternoon, they have a pleasurable lunchtime experience eating delicious food in comfortable surroundings, thus enabling them to have better concentration and be calmer.

One key thing in the forefront of the Leadership Team's minds was that this was not a profit making initiative. Meals are competitively priced, with an average spend of £2.40 per day. We recognised that we couldn't make all the changes overnight – the improvements to the preparation and service facilities happened gradually.



Over the years we have had hundreds of visitors wanting to know more about, and experience at first hand, our catering enterprise. **catering4schools.com** is our response to try to help other schools follow our lead. This website has a fully searchable database gives comprehensive details for over 500 individual recipes, giving a choice of more than 40,000 different meal combinations. Each recipe is automatically adjusted according to the number of servings required, and to the age range of the children, enabling each school to create their own tailored school meal plan.

Top Tips

1. Length of service

Ensure the lunch break is of adequate duration to be able to serve all the students. At St. Aidan's we have maintained a one hour lunch break to facilitate us to serve in the region of 1,800 meals per day. In addition, there is a before and after school service available to all students and staff.

2. Cashless catering

This helps to speed up the process as well as making all the students the same, irrespective of whether they receive free school meals or not. In addition we have introduced Parentpay, with the facility for parents to pay online as well as being able to observe the meal choices the students make.

3. Skilled chef/catering manager

It is important to employ the right person to lead the catering team.

4. Pleasant environment

Create a positive eating environment has a calming effect on the students, enabling them to relax and enjoy the food prior to their afternoon lessons.

5. Variety of dishes available

It is important to have a variety of food available, which can be geared towards the age group served in that particular area, for example Year 7 do not need as many choices as 6th Form students who are able to eat at different times during the day, according to their timetable. It also creates a pleasant environment where the students feel confident and comfortable to sit and enjoy meals with their peers. The full range of options of food available can be viewed on **www.catering4schools.com**

6. Staff using the dining facilities

This can be encouraged by providing free school meals in exchange for a lunch duty each week. It has a calming effect on the children and can help promote positive interaction between staff and students.

7. Food surveys with students

Make the students feel like valued customers by asking for their feedback and suggestions on the food service available. We do this on a bi-annual basis and it has been very effective.

8. Customer care

Customer care training provided for the catering team to ensure communication and service is of the highest quality. Our food and our presentation is restaurant quality.

9. Crockery

To maintain a restaurant standard all meals to be served on crockery with metal cutlery, rather than plastic.

10. Menus

Menus to be posted around the school and also on the school's website, to ensure that both parents and students can see in advance what is available.