



Increasing meal take-up by 40% through a whole school approach

Enrolled with FFLP since 2009, and a gold awarded school, Dereham Neatherd High School is an excellent example of how adopting the whole school approach has made a real difference to their school food culture.

Thanks to strong leadership, proactive caterers, pupil and community involvement, alongside a fantastic cooking and growing culture, Dereham Neatherd have increased their school meal take-up from 20% to 60%.

But how have they done it?

Strong leadership – making lunchtime a priority

- The Head Teacher's school food policy has been signed off by the governing body and continues to give lunchtime a clear priority in the school day.
- Vulnerable pupils, including autistic children, are taken down to the canteen slightly earlier, in order for them to have a positive and calm dining experience.
- An early lunch has been used as a reward for some of our more challenging classes, a strategy which has impacted positively on behaviour and learning.
- Head Teacher Peter Devonish says, "Actions have taken the place of words and our FFLP status is now central to the school's ethos".

Quality food – caterers Edwards & Blake are working towards the Soil Association's Food for Life Gold Catering Mark award

- Edwards & Blake have been providing catering for the school since 2013 and have introduced a hugely popular new menu. The response from pupils and staff has been very positive indeed with school meal uptake now at 60%.
- Graeme the head chef and his band of wonderful cooks produce a menu that has an emphasis on healthy and organic food. They are also working to reduce and recycle packaging and food waste.

Pupil voice

- The most significant change to impact pupils' dining experience has been the pupil-led changes to the canteen, all of which were a result of pupil surveys, School Nutrition Action Group discussions and a mini-conference of the School Council, canteen and site staff.
- Throughout the year they hold FFLP themed assemblies for all members of the school community. These have raised awareness of all the FFLP work going on in school and have been met with an immediate and enthusiastic response from pupils and parents alike.
- The school magazine has a full FFLP page spread in every issue, featuring growing, cooking, recipe-making and apron-designing competitions, showcasing the huge number of people in the school community who 'Make a Positive Contribution'.

Parents and community involvement

- Many parents attended cooking competitions, such as the Chilli Cook-Off, where over 20 staff and pupils competed to be crowned best chef
- By promoting healthy eating assemblies, organising whole school growing and cooking competitions and inviting parents in to the school on a regular basis, it is clear that pupils and their parents have been taking an interest and are now growing and cooking at home.

Growing

- Every lunchtime, students take part in a gardening club, run an allotment, and plant edible borders with herbs, fruit and onions, to supply the school canteen, where an estimated 40% of the ingredients come from organic sources.
- Every year the school runs growing competitions, and involve vegetables being grown in every form room and office in the school (so far they have had chilli, pea, cucumber and tomato competitions).
- The latest development for the Gardening Club is the brand new poly tunnel, which has just been built and will be used to supply the canteen with salad and veg throughout the year, as well as being a new outdoor classroom used by various departments.
- Thomas Jones, Deputy head boy at the school, said: *“I really enjoy the whole aspect of the gardening. The more organic it is and the more locally-grown it is, the healthier it is going to be, and it is better for air miles and the environment. That is why it interests me.”*

The dining environment

- A breakfast bar has been built and 20 bar stools purchased. With the addition of a pupil-chosen playlist for the new sound system, the canteen is a vibrant and healthy social hub of the school site.
- The school has purchased 20 picnic benches and constructed two covered outside dining areas for children who eat packed lunches or the canteen's 'Grab and Go' lunches. Uptake of school meals continues to rise: 550 meals per day + 110 'Grab and Go'. Free schools meals uptake is currently at 91%.
- The school has a designated budget to improve the displays in the canteen and aims to get pupils to research and design their own food provenance display.

Will Clennell is the Food for Life Partnership lead in the school and said,

“Since becoming the school’s Environment & Sustainability Co-ordinator I have seen the school become a community which really has growing, cooking and healthy eating at the centre of its thinking. The various Food for Life Partnership clubs and projects have created a real buzz around the school and the fantastic canteen is the busiest place on the site. Our growing and cooking competitions are always brilliantly successful and I believe the healthy attitude pupil now have towards food is at the heart of improved behaviour and academic progress.

Most recently we have concentrated on improving our links with community groups and our feeder schools and are able, through this work, to spread the FFLP ethos about the importance of local, organic, healthy food.”