

Reach Academy Feltham Case Study

Here at Reach Academy in Feltham, south west London, we believe that pupils have a good attitude to food because their teachers eat with them. The children sit at long tables, family style, with teachers scattered among them. Before the food is served, a teacher stands up and gives a small speech – almost like a secular grace – about the delicious meal we are about to enjoy. The food is then brought to the tables, and one child at each table is tasked with dishing it up.

The result is civilised lunches. Several of our pupils have come to Reach after struggling at other schools, and the convivial atmosphere of our meals leads to relaxed chats with staff about future academic plans, such as studying at university. After the meal, a senior member of staff stands and thanks our cook. Our dining hall sets the tone for the whole school, encouraging kindness and a sense of togetherness.

A huge part of the puzzle is ensuring that the food is of a high quality and is enjoyable for the pupils and staff. This is where our amazing chef and his team come in. They believe in using fresh produce every day and everything is handmade in the school kitchen. As a result, we have delicious lunches, prompting a visiting Boris Johnson to proclaim it 'the best school lunch I've ever had!' and the founder of Leon restaurants, Henry Dimbleby to shower our head chef and his team with accolades. Our head chef manages to produce this high quality lunch at the same price point as other local schools, to keep it affordable for our families.

We are constantly refining our school lunch experience. For example, this year we introduced 'mindful eating' whereby a chime is struck and all the children and adults eat in silence, mindfully tasting their food and enjoying the meal for 3 minutes before returning to conversation when the chime is struck a second time. This has dual benefits: The children learn to savour their food and it encourages the slower eaters to concentrate on eating!

Our senior team benefited from visiting many schools and seeing a variety of school food arrangements. This enabled us to create a shared vision for what we wanted in our school. It is essential that this vision starts with the Senior Leadership Team and then flows through the school and to the families. Whilst school lunch is compulsory at our school, we find that any families that may have been resistant are convinced of the value of the model when they see it in action and see the quality of the food. For any schools considering modifying their lunch arrangements we would suggest that this is the first, essential step: Have a look at (ideally visit) some successful examples and ensure that your vision comes from the very top of the school. We would be pleased to host visits at Reach Academy.