



## **Improved lunch provision and breakfast club a key factor in improving attendance, attitudes to learning and pupil progress**

In 2009, Newham Council took part in the Government's Universal Free School Meals pilot. When the pilot ended in July 2011, Newham made the decision to extend the scheme so that all primary school children in the borough could continue to benefit.

Theresa Aanonson, Head Teacher of St Luke's Primary and Nursery School in Newham explains how an improved lunch provision and breakfast club have had a positive impact on attendance, attitudes to learning and pupil progress.

"Free school meals have been an excellent idea. We had already raised concerns about the quality of packed lunches prior to 2009. By offering free school meals (FSM) to all pupils we can ensure a safe, balanced lunch to set the children up well for the pm session.

As most of the pupils had previously had a school lunch, or brought in a packed lunch, we were able to seat and supervise most of the school at lunchtime. Practical organisation of the lunch break; seating, serving and hosting the numbers eating school lunch has led to some tweaking of kitchen hours and support, but generally it has been relatively easy to increase the number of hot meals served from 12-1pm. The biggest challenge is when we have Community Lunches with up to 50 extra servings which requires a flexible approach from all staff in order to get the job done.

Academic standards have continued to rise and although it's impossible to say it's just due to one factor, I am convinced that eating a good meal at lunchtime, having fruit at morning break, water available during the day and targeted Breakfast Club provision has helped keep the children alert and ready to learn.

### **Pupil Voice – The Health & Wellbeing Group**

In order to capture the views of pupils we have an elected pupil group responsible for Health and Well Being. We have always had a School Council but we found, over the years, that there was just too much for one group to monitor and manage change. This is why we now have THREE Pupil Voice groups – Health and Well Being, Safety and Eco.

The Health & Wellbeing Group



The Health and Well Being Group give regular feedback to the school cook, who meets with them to discuss menus, so most of pupil and parent concerns are addressed. We've had special tasting sessions at Open evenings so that parents can experience the quality and range of food available. Our regular termly Community Lunches have also played an important part in educating and exciting parents and pupils.



Our annual School Self-evaluation process enables pupils to raise concerns and also applaud what the school does well. I believe parents and pupils know that they are listened to, as important stakeholders, and recognise that we use all their responses to improve provision further including our breakfast and lunchtime offer.

We have used a wide range of strategies to increase the take-up of school lunches (currently at 99.6%) and to improve pupils' and parents' understanding of the impact of healthy diets, ample sleep and plenty of exercise on progress, attainment and achievement. There is regular coverage in school newsletters, on the school website, at Open Evenings, through curriculum provision, special projects and events and home learning tasks. For example, the pupils are currently keeping Health and Well-being diaries where they record what they eat, how much they sleep and how much exercise they are taking.

The elected Food Group usually agree the theme of our termly Community meals. Once the theme is agreed and the date set the school cook proposes a menu based on the pupils' ideas. Once this has been agreed, the kitchen get on with the major catering and preparation required because numbers go up with parents, friends, local residents etc all joining us. The pupils then consider how we can decorate the hall to fit the theme. There is a small termly budget to cover these costs and judging from feedback, the decorated hall adds to the atmosphere and success of the event. We collect feedback and take photos at each lunch and use these to improve our practice further. We're always learning.

### **Positive impact of Free School Meals**

Whilst it is impossible to say the improvement in overall standards is just a result of an improved lunch provision, I am certain it has played a key factor in improving attendance, attitudes to learning and pupil progress.

Sally joined Reception having had no previous nursery education. Her elder brother had a poor attendance record and both pupils were taken home for lunch, Despite our best efforts, neither pupil would 'try school lunch'. Parents were encouraged to taste different food at Open Evening and accepted an invitation to have lunch with their children at a Community Meal. Sally was also invited to become an associate member of the Health and Well-being Group. Following this we saw a change. She started having school lunch, her

attendance improved; she showed greater independence and reliance and is now making very good progress. She is on track to exceed national expectations by the end of Key Stage Two.

### **Positive impact of the Breakfast Club**

John joined Reception as a 'summer born birthday.' He had attended another nursery and it was clear to school staff on admission, that he was a vulnerable pupil. There was inconsistent parenting at home from a young, inexperienced mother. There was an older child who was a result of a teenage pregnancy. The mother and two children shared a home with grandmother and there were concerns about overcrowding, sleep routines and poor diet. John had periodic attendance, a poor punctuality record and often came to school saying he was hungry and falling asleep in class. The school organised a Breakfast Club place for John and targeted him for additional learning support. Staff were alerted to his needs and non-arrival at school by 7.45am triggered a telephone call home. He eats a school lunch every day and is subject to close monitoring. The challenge is to ensure that he accesses holiday activities which include food. He is more alert in school and has not fallen asleep in class for some time. The school is confident that he has his main food intake at school. His attendance is good, punctuality has obviously improved because of Breakfast Club and he is making good progress although this is dependent on a high level of learning support.

### **Support from pupils, parents and staff**

The project has been well supported by the enthusiasm and commitment of staff who give up time to eat with parents and pupils; parents who come back again and again and rearrange work commitments to come and have lunch with their children and the pupils who are always full of ideas about what they want!

Over time the quality and variety of food has improved. Pupils, parents and staff are not afraid of giving feedback because they know we respond. There is a real passion for food generally with pupils and parents actively supporting our community lunches.

The school has incurred some additional cost for teacher cover on Theme days. A termly budget is allocated for resources but the biggest input has been staff time and energy.

### **Tips for implementation**

It is impossible to list or quantify the amount of time and effort of this element of school improvement. It is important to keep our eyes on the goal. I would say to colleagues: Find out from your pupils and parents what they want, what gets them excited and work with that. Each school is different and what's worked for us may be different for them. We have an amazing outside patio which enables us to eat outside in the summer which goes down really well but this won't be the same in every school.

Start small and use evaluations and feedback to plan next steps. Our community meals were quite low key at the beginning but are now major productions once a term. Think about the overall benefits to the school when things are tough and keep your eye on the longer picture. Change takes time."