

How to encourage children into the school dining hall

Challenge: Children won't visit the dining hall

Solution: Provide an open morning (perhaps at weekend) so parents and children can tour the school dining hall, sample dishes from the school menu and meet the catering staff. Make the chef a more visible member of the whole school community, attending assembly etc

Challenge: Children won't eat new options in the dining room

Solution: Children could be introduced through taste and touch any new ingredients so the ingredients are familiar before they appear on the menu such as during a cooking activity. Mix up the children who are good eaters with the less enthusiastic eaters to encourage role models. Small taster portions of new recipe ideas could be put out on tables with a simple yes/no vote box so children can have a chance to taste and catering can get a feel for the possible popularity of new dishes.

Challenge: Children don't know what to choose from the menu

Solution: Introduce tasting in class e.g. use registration or break time as an opportunity to introduce new ingredients/dishes and discussions about healthy choices and help them decide what they will eat each day that week

Challenge: Parents don't engage/support with the school menu

Solution: Involve the children in making a film of a selection of dishes on offer and publish it on the school website along with the menus. Introduce an 'invite a parent day' where children are able to invite a family member to eat with them in the dining room.

Challenge: Children entitled to free school meals are differentiated and thus identified

Solution: Use a payment system that enables all children to access the meals without the source of funding being obvious – so a card or token system for example

Challenge: Visiting the school dining room can be an overwhelming experience, due to the sheer numbers of people and the amount of food and the noise

Solution: Offer priority to new pupils for the first half a term and set up a buddy system where those who are familiar with the system can show others the ropes