



FEEDING MINDS AND MOUTHS

Visiting East Ham's Hartley Primary School at lunchtime is a bit like walking through central London during rush hour. The hustle and bustle of children in the playground is a delight to watch but hard work to manage. This scene isn't exclusive to Hartley and that's why every school day, midday assistants across the borough don their high-vis jackets and play their part in making lunchtimes lovely for children in our schools.

Sharifa Yusuf is the senior midday supervisor at Hartley Primary, part of team of five lunchtime staff. For the past 13 years she has overseen lunchtimes at the school and has seen how the free school meals have made a difference to children and parents alike.

She describes the most important aspects of any playtime, lunch or otherwise, as safety and enjoyment. Despite her years patrolling the playground, when she heard about new training being offered to all midday assistants to enhance and improve the lunchtime experience for children she quickly put herself and her colleagues down for a day in the classroom.

The workshop-style training was all about ideas. As well as looking at the role of lunchtime staff, the team at Hartley

learned how to promote positive lunchtime behaviour and encourage healthy eating.

“We’ve come a long way since the days when some kids would come to school with cakes, crisps or a packet of biscuits for their packed lunch”

She said: “In the dining hall, we looked across the board, from the layout and décor to the food and beverages. As a team we decided that we needed more posters promoting healthy food, which would encourage children to eat better.

“We’ve quite a compact hall but came up with changes like round tables instead of benches and a water cooler

for the children to get their drinks. These suggestions might not all happen, but the training has helped us look at things differently and how we can improve every aspect of what we offer at lunchtime.”

As a Newham parent herself, Sharifa beams as she says what a difference free school meals have made to her. The financial burden of lunchtime no longer exists and she is confident that her daughter is eating well. She said: “Nearly all our children take up our offer of free school meals. Even those that were reluctant at first have been converted – and we’ve even had a few ‘wows’ at meal time! We’ve come a long way since the days when some kids would come to school with cakes, crisps or a packet of biscuits for their packed lunch.”



The Mayor's Promise #3

Free school meals for all primary school children

Straight from their mouths

Michaela, Year 6, thoroughly enjoys her free school meals. Her favourite dish is chicken and rice, and at school, she has tried new foods like salmon.



Lisa, Year 6, ate vegetable samosas for the first time at school. She admits that school dinners are healthier than a packed lunch and said pizza was her all-time favourite dish.

Armani, Year 4, says chicken curry is his favourite dish on the menu and agrees that school dinners are healthy and delicious.

