

BEST PRACTICE

East Sheen Primary School and Pride Catering

In 2005, with take-up at only 10%, East Sheen Primary knew it was time to look at its school meal provision. Only 40 children out of 400 were taking school meals and this was at a school where nearly 60 children were entitled to free meals.

The school used the borough provider, so in order to move forward with a new caterer, East Sheen Primary needed to look carefully at the contract between LBRUT and the caterer. The contract in relation to East Sheen Primary was soon to expire. With the help of a parent with legal expertise, it was able to serve notice without penalty and determine that the kitchen equipment belonged to the school and not the previous caterer.

The project was led by a dynamic working party of Head, Deputy, governors and parents and was fully supported by the parent body. Four companies were invited to tender for the catering contract, which was awarded to Pride Catering in Surrey. Pride was already servicing five primary schools in the area, so the working party was able to go along and see it in action and taste their school lunches.



Funding

Pride Catering had recommended a kitchen upgrade costing over £55,000. The governors agreed to use £20,000, mostly from the school governors' fund and a small percentage from capital funding. An additional £5,000 was received through LEA and government grants. An enthusiastic PTA managed to raise the outstanding £30,000 through special fundraisers. Parent governor, Terry Buckland who led the working party emphasises the importance of marketing. "The key is to get the whole school involved in the project as soon as possible." With the parents and children fully on board, East Sheen Primary managed to raise over £20,000 in just 11 weeks. This was achieved through newsletters, fun fundraisers, theme days and lots of work with the children around the benefits of healthy eating.

Pride also played an important role in marketing by coming to the school's annual summer fair, setting up a stall and talking to parents. It also produced newsletters specific to East Sheen Primary, establishing a true partnership with the school.

Monitoring and Development

Parents have been allowed to come in and try school meals from day one, which acts as an excellent monitoring system. The staff too can be regularly found in the dining room. The school works with Pride to produce regular satisfaction surveys, which are completed by every child in the school. For the younger children, who are unable to complete the form, the survey becomes a classroom activity with the teachers listening to their likes and dislikes.

Sustainability

School meals at East Sheen Primary started out at £2.00 each, rising to £2.05 after a year. In the first year, take-up increased by a staggering 70%, from only 40 children taking school meals in 2005, to around 320 today. This far exceeded expectations. The school now works on a minimum take-up of 175 to break even, which covers the cost of extra staff enlisted to cope with

the large numbers. The profits subsidise children entitled to free school meals (the borough allowance initially fell below the meal cost, but has since risen to £2.00) and any surplus is ploughed back into the service.

Sourcing

Pride Catering, based in Guildford, gives its operations managers a choice of local and regional suppliers. Pride MD, Tim Price said "It is vital as a fresh food company to use the best suppliers possible. Local suppliers such as farm shops, bakeries, dairies and butchers can provide us with superb quality produce and service. We like to put our business back into the local community where we can and our chefs know how to buy seasonally to maximize the use of local produce when at its best. The issue of food miles is always a consideration and a holistic approach to sourcing is high on our agenda."

Cooking and Growing

Deputy Head Helen Colbert has great plans to develop East Sheen's cooking and growing programmes. The school has signed up to The Academy of Culinary Arts project, Chefs Adopt a School and in the spring term, year six students will receive a master class, in school, from a Claridges chef. The children will then be able to visit the Claridges kitchen to learn how to make sushi.

The school has previously enjoyed vegetable growing on their allotment, but the space has been lost due to a new building project. Happily, Pride has agreed to sponsor a new allotment space and in the summer term the children will be growing tomatoes and beans to be used in the school kitchen by Pride's chef.

Outcomes and Benefits

The school quickly noticed better concentration levels from the children in the afternoons. Teachers have described a "marked improvement" and remain very positive about the changes. East Sheen has also enjoyed

watching the children improve their social skills over lunch and have noted that when eating with their peers, many children will try new and previously unexplored vegetables. One child declared:



"I love the white broccoli!"

Head teacher,
David Ford said:

"The decision to appoint our own school meals contractor was a huge one for the school. It involved the whole community, children, staff, parents and governors. But one year in to our new service we can honestly say it was worth all the hard work and fundraising. We now provide our children with delicious fresh school meals and we are so proud of all our efforts. What a brilliant success story!"

Having successfully transformed its school meal provision, East Sheen Primary is now uniquely placed to help other schools wanting to make the change. In 2006, Terry and his working party were able to advise The Vineyard Primary when they decided to opt out of the borough contract in Spring 2007.

The Vineyard did a phenomenal job of researching, funding and implementing their changes in just four months, raising £40,000 for their kitchen from the parent body with quiz nights, newsletters and its special "carrotometer". The school has experienced a similar leap in numbers: from 60 children under the borough provision to a massive 225 within the first few weeks under Pride Catering.

The children at East Sheen Primary have the last word on Pride's school meals ...

"I wish they did takeaways"

"It's much better than my mum's cooking"