

Using food to bridge the achievement gap: Greenfields Community School

Nottingham is Britain's poorest city. Half a mile from the city centre, surrounded by housing estates beset by social problems, is Greenfields Community School.

Some 60% of our pupils are eligible for free school meals. 80% come from an ethnic minority background and a quarter are the children of asylum seekers, refugees or economic migrants. They speak more than 30 different languages between them.

Terry Smith, our head teacher, sees food as not only fuel for our hard-working children, but also as a means of expanding their horizons. The introduction of the Pupil Premium – with money paid for each child entitled to free school meals – means that Greenfields now receives an extra £90,000 a year (around 8% of its total budget). This money is spent on extra-curricular activities that help bridge the “achievement gap”, such as music lessons, a school counsellor, a Learning Mentor and cooking and gardening sessions.

A professional gardener comes in weekly to teach our children, tend our vegetable patch and run our after-school gardening club. Two teachers have also been trained as “Forest School” practitioners, developing our pupils' outdoor skills. All our children learn to cook at school, using lesson plans developed with the Food for Life Partnership. Our lunches, supplied by Nottingham City Catering, are made from locally sourced and organic ingredients.

Educating our children about where their food comes from helps them to make healthy choices – 65% now eat school meals – and augments their wider understanding of the world.

Greenfields is regularly in the top 10% of schools in the country for its marked progression from key stage 1 to key stage 2 SATS – in other words, from starting to leaving school – and is rated “outstanding” by OFSTED.