



Fuel for School: stopping hunger from being a barrier to learning in schools

Providing children with high quality teaching is at the heart of a successful school. The efficiency of quality input from such teachers can be negated by many well documented external factors.

At Richmond Hill Primary School we have identified hunger as being a major barrier to learning and believe this has a negative impact on the outcomes achieved by children.

Universal Infant Free School Meals is a positive intervention in tackling the challenge of hunger, however, consider the fact that the traditional model of education front loads key learning during morning sessions when children are at their most productive and the impact of this is significantly reduced.

A high percentage of children attend school each day without breaking the fast of the previous day and some even without a drink. Many factors contribute to this; poverty and unconscious neglect being the two most common. An empty stomach affects concentration, energy levels, attentiveness and emotional wellbeing. Prolonged exposure to lack of food ultimately results in children working below age related expectations. Traditional models of interventions, designed to support children “catch up” and “close the gap”, are ineffective if the targeted children continue to present each day at school with empty stomachs.

The challenge to ensure that children arrive at school ready to learn could be considered to be a combined effort between home and school with the emphasis on home. However, when considering the accountability of schools in terms of academic outcomes for children, the balance shifts towards the need for increased efforts from schools to control as many factors as possible.

Providing children with food each morning would be costly both financially and in terms of time when the timetable is already beyond capacity. Having identified hunger as a barrier to learning it has been essential to find a sustainable solution.

In specific response to removing the barrier of hunger from the start of each school day we have been able to intercept large quantities of bread. Our goal is to provide toast each morning to all our pupils (600) using only intercepted breads served with homemade jams produced in school, by pupils using intercepted fruits.



Fuel for School

Working in partnership with the Real Junk Food Project, we have become aware of the vast amounts of entirely edible waste food that is created each day. Supermarkets, caterers, independent traders and wholesalers all generate tons of waste food that predominantly heads straight to landfill sites. Businesses are charged for the disposal of their waste yet it seems they accept such fees as part of their running costs.

Fuel for School has two key objectives:

1. Highlight the importance of nutrition and the associated benefits linked to learning

2. Highlight the vast amounts of wasted (yet perfectly edible) food across our local and wider communities.

School Café and Market Stall

With the support of our partners we have been able to intercept waste food products and utilise them within our school based café and weekly food boutique. A wide variety of products have been distributed through this initiative: fruit, vegetables, pastries, cakes, bread, cheese, cooking oil, tinned and jarred products to name a few. As an enterprise we have grown quickly and have now established formal links with a large wholesaler and a branch of Morrisons, Hovis and Arla. These partners are able to ensure regular food supplies for school.



Our outlet (open through term time and school holidays) follows the principles of the Real Junk Food Project and operates on a “pay as you feel” basis, providing our local community with good quality food at a price to suit. Pay as you feel is a currency that can be traded in terms of time, skills and even in food swaps! In most schools rewards are given for good work, effort and behaviour such rewards are usually exchanged for certificates and low cost items purchased by schools. At Richmond Hill, from September 2015, all children from Y2 – Y6 have been given a credit card to store their reward points on, these points can then be used as currency within our café or at the food boutique.

Education

Education is at the core of our work and the school curriculum has been designed to support children and families develop a deeper understanding of food and its associated nutritional content. All children in school will receive 4 cooking lessons each year, increasing in complexity as they progress through school. The school website has a selection of recipes that can be made from the foods available in the café and from the boutique.

Many additional learning opportunities are facilitated through children accessing the school café and food boutique. Speaking and listening, numeracy, literacy and social skills are all promoted through the work that children complete within the learning environment either as customers or employees.

“We wanted to give all our pupils breakfast at school, but without the waste food we simply wouldn’t have been able to do it due to financial restrictions. We now have a member of staff who, as part of their role, go to Hovis twice a week to collect 200 surplus loaves, and visit Morrisons in Harehills twice a week after 5pm to collect any yellow stickered reduced items that are left. We also collect fruit and veg from a wholesaler near school and a grocer shop in Chapel Allerton who allow us to take their perfectly edible waste food away.

“We are now able to provide every child at Richmond Hill with toast for breakfast each morning, and sell the rest in our café and stall which are open to the public. People come and take what they need, stay and have a cuppa with us and then Pay As They Feel. Since July we have saved 9 ½ tonnes of food from landfill which is an incredible amount!” **Nathan Atkinson, Headteacher, Richmond Hill School**

Find out more here: <http://www.richmondhillleeds.co.uk/fuel-for-school/>