



## ***How Food for Life Partnership training helped Swindon cooks improve school lunchtimes and increase school meal take-up***

### **Overview**

A group of 14 Swindon school cooks completed a series of four training sessions led by Jeanette Orrey, the school dinner lady who co-founded the Food for Life Partnership and inspired Jamie Oliver to launch his school meals initiative. The training was funded by Public Health Swindon and took place at Swindon Academy. The pilot was designed to support a change in food culture in local schools and to increase school meal uptake.

### **What did the training sessions cover?**

The school cooks were shown how they could improve the quality of food served, the dining environment and prioritise a whole school approach when considering school food. The training also provided a platform for participants to share ideas and learn from each other. The training was delivered in two practical blocks so cooks had time to implement some of what they learned and then feedback to the group and build on this in the following sessions.

Jeanette, who led the training and who has been part of the School Food Plan's Expert Panel for the past year said, "School cooks have such an important role to play, not on providing healthy, freshly prepared nutritious meals but also helping pupils understand where their food comes from, teaching them good eating habits from an early age. With the rollout of universal free school meals to all 5 to 7 years olds from September 2014, we need to support our school cooks. We need to ensure they not only have all the skills to serve quality meals to our children but also have the time and equipment needed to do this effectively."

### **Why was the training effective?**

All the training was centered around a whole school approach and supporting the school kitchen teams and business managers to think beyond the food and consider marketing and menu development, which will in time increase engagement and take up.

School cooks on the training were able to share ideas and get away from their kitchens. By receiving training in a college setting they benefitted from the skills and experience of their trainer.

Peer to peer learning has been high, with the cooks sharing difficulties and discussing ways of tackling them. This continued beyond the sessions which has made their positive influence much greater.

Small groups of less than 15 build rapport and confidence giving an open forum to share and learn from each other.

### **What have the results been?**

The results have been immediate and many of the changes have been simple and cost-free to implement. Some examples of the changes schools have made are:

- Consulting with pupils and parents on school meal improvements.
- Children with packed lunches are eating in the dining hall as part of the lunchtime service and have been provided with plates for their sandwiches.
- Changing status from a 'school kitchen' to a 'children's restaurant' which pupils are voting on a name for and sharing ideas on menu choice.
- Improving the dining experience by providing new cutlery and crockery.
- Getting pupils, parents, grandparents and the local community involved with school food by holding events such as family food quiz nights.
- Getting involved with the School Nutrition Action Group or taking cookery classes can raise the profile of school meals and impact take-up.

### **How it will help schools increase take-up?**

For example, Eldene Primary School saw a school meal increase of over 7% to over 50% in the weeks following the training and they have plans in place to continue gaining momentum.

### **What the schools said.**

Sam Wells, School Business Manager at Eldene Primary School, one of the participating schools said, "My Catering Manager and I are passionate about providing the best school meals service we can. Attending these training sessions has enabled us to celebrate and share the things we do well, and also create a practical action plan for further improvement.

"We have looked at the provision from the children's viewpoint, offering tasters of unfamiliar foods and have plans to improve the dining hall. We have increased our school meal take up by 7% to over 50% since the course started and hope to increase it further. We hosted a family evening 'healthy meals on a budget' and 80 parents and pupils attended and they all took home seeds and pots to start 'growing their own'."

### **The schools who participated were:**

East Wichel Community Primary and Nursery School

Nythe Primary School

Eldene Primary School

Holy Rood Catholic Junior School

Mountford Manor Primary School

The White Horse Federation

Wroughton Junior School

Goddard Park Primary School

Bridlewood Primary School

