

Creating an environment and menus our students and staff enjoy

In 2012, we carried out a complete review of our catering services, as part of a wider project as Westbourne – a High School for 11-16 year olds – became an academy in February 2013.

The motivation was to provide the type of facilities and menu that our students and staff would **choose** to go to, whilst ensuring the menu was reasonably healthy and could be served quickly and effectively within our limited lunch time. We wanted to encourage students to stay on site, eat more healthily and have ready access to the refreshments we know are beneficial not only to their physical wellbeing but also their academic success.

Our existing canteen was housed in a building erected as ‘temporary’ in the 1940s, set away from the main school. As part of the catering review project, we developed a new catering concept and commissioned a new kitchen and dining room, built in underused space in a central area of the campus, with the intention to improve pastoral student care by making food an integral part of the school.



Some “before and after” images are included to show the huge difference the new facility has made.

Following a detailed tender process, our incumbent caterer, EATS (the commercial catering company wholly owned by Suffolk County Council), successfully retained the outsourced catering contract, and as part of our mobilisation plan to launch the new dining room in September 2013, we instigated a number of pioneering projects:

- **Branding.** We recognised the need to create a strong marketing identity, which the



students could relate to. Our caterer worked with a cutting edge design agency who produced an identity for our new “Food Hall”, including food merchandising, menus and signage which uses our new Academy logo and has a great “high street” feel to it. Students have said that they like that the branding is unique to us and can see it is of a high quality.

- **Food.** Research conducted by our caterers showed that students wanted us to reflect their tastes, and come away from traditional “**school meals**”. We worked with our caterer’s development chef and our Food Production Manager Rosie to produce dishes based on “Fast Casual Dining”, as seen on the high street. The innovation in using boxed meals (pictured) means that students are *interested* in the food on offer, and our catering team has introduced a retail style sub-bar, which has made a big difference. Students are eating healthy fruit and salad pots, and are trying new dishes, because it looks and feels like somewhere they would eat at weekends.
- **Pricing and Cashless.** Westbourne Academy sits in an area of relative deprivation, and as such our average spend per head is low, and we have a high proportion of Free School Meal Students (20% of total roll against a 19% national average). We have worked with our catering team to develop different price range items, such as value rolls (made using bread made fresh every day from local wholemeal flour), drinks and cookies. Our cashless system has eliminated the stigma around FSM, and certainly speeded up queue times, and by offering plenty of meal-deals and options to spend the FSM allowance, we have ensured that there is a balance between affordability and quality food being consumed, ensuring that healthy options are always on offer.
- **Engagement.** One of our key aims was to make food a more integrated part of the school day. Our caterer appointed a Food Service Manager – Claire Wilden – dedicated to Westbourne Academy, who works as a commercial lead and liaises directly with the school, offering advice and helping us implement new initiatives. As Claire only has limited involvement in food production (covered by Rosie, our Food Production Manager), this ensures seamless service. This has proved beneficial in introducing elements such as a link with our Design department who used their CAD and CNC equipment to create a “Westbourne cookie stamp”, which is used on our healthy oat based cookies, flavoured with raisins, cinnamon or ginger; our Food Service Manager Claire gives talks to our Food Technology and Business classes; and we have a new kitchen herb garden which also carries the Food Hall Branding.



Finally, Our Head often proudly tours prospective parents and students around the Food Hall; and teachers often holding meetings there during the day, as well as using the breakfast service regularly, able to get a quality start to the day, with porridge, toast, vegetarian options and especially for a Friday five-item treat!

Overall, our Food Hall now reflects the aspirations of our Academy, and we are proud of how busy all our service points are during breakfast, break and lunch – showing what a success the project has been in bringing together Westbourne, its students, staff, our caterers, and great food – in a social setting which is a fantastic advert for our school. The proof of success is in the stats: we have gone

from a canteen with 27% uptake; to a Food Hall at 51% uptake selling over 83% more food than the same time last year, in a vibrant setting which is a real advert for Westbourne Academy.