

Kirklees: Delivering Silver Food for Life Catering Mark menus for local primary and secondary schools

Kirklees Council have been operating a school meals service for over 40 years, and serve 33,000 school meals to Catering Mark Silver standards each day. Jeanette Cartwright, Food & Nutrition Officer for Kirklees Council, talks about applying for and achieving the Silver Food for Life Catering Mark:

“We decided to apply for the Food Catering Mark to improve our existing standards and raise the profile of the Catering Service through the award scheme; which in turn has a fantastic impact on the food served in our schools and Extra Care Schemes.

“We were also keen to support the schools already signed up to the Food for Life Partnership programme, and were aware that achieving the Catering Mark would help schools automatically meet some of the Food for Life criteria.

“The award also presented a good opportunity to support the wider council objective of improving the health and wellbeing of children and the wider community. As one of our council’s four key objectives is food and nutrition, the Catering Mark could significantly contribute to delivering on these aims.

Making the changes:

“Kirklees’ menus already met some of the FFLP criteria and provided menus of a high standard, but some changes were needed to ensure we met the standards. These changes included sourcing Farm Assured meat, introducing Free Range eggs and Fairtrade products, and minimized bought-in products and convenience items to ensure our menus reach at least 85% freshly prepared. We started using more seasonal items, and using organic pasta, oats, flour, yoghurts and carrots.

“Challenges included sourcing specific products, the cost of ingredients, and general supply and demand issues, but generally suppliers were very supportive. We have managed to continue working with all existing suppliers, but worked with them to source local produce within the Yorkshire region and adjoining counties. Most of our fruit and vegetables come from Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. Understanding the Catering Mark points scoring system for our Silver award required support from the Soil Association team - without it we would have struggled! We have managed to remain within food budgets set for each school.

“We are now providing 23 secondary schools with Catering Mark menus; including two middle-schools which operate the same service as High-schools. Due to high standards the % uptake in Kirklees has in the main generally been above the national average. Currently primary schools in Kirklees are at 54% uptake and high schools in Kirklees are at 53% uptake.”

Communicating our success: key to engaging schools and staff

“Kirklees catering service took the lead on producing menus to the Catering Mark Standard - and the award is a testament to our good relationships and trust that we have with the schools we work with. Having a Catering Manager/Supervisor on site in each school has meant that we have empowered them to take the lead and to communicate the work we do, as well as communicating information through a schools website and newsletter. They take the lead for working with their schools individually; e.g developing tailored menus and training staff to get involved in teaching children to cook so that they can fully support curriculum changes.

“We launched the award through the local media, different websites: aimed at schools, Head teachers and catering. We engaged community council magazines, newsletters, menus and all other promotional material that goes out to schools and local communities throughout the council. We feel it is of real importance to communicate the quality and provenance of our food; to raise the profile of the catering service and the council, to gain confidence of our customers and showcase the standards of our service, to retain business, to contribute to the wider agenda of the health and wellbeing of local children and to support the role of food in educating children.

Benefits

“Through the award, we have seen great retention of business (working with 99% of schools), good % uptake, and have built very positive relationships with partners such as the NHS, Food for Life Partnership and Soil Association and other council colleagues who work on children’s health initiatives towards a joined up approach across the council.

“We feel we are really contributing to the health and wellbeing of local children and the wider community, whilst raising the profile of Kirklees catering service locally and nationally, and securing new business. It has been a real opportunity to improve quality and provenance of food, therefore improving reputation.

“Our catering staff are very proud and supportive and generally embrace the whole initiative. A large percentage have used it as a platform to work more closely with schools; supporting cooking and growing projects with strong links in working with schools to achieve their Food for Life Partnership awards. We’ve had very, very positive in general from staff, schools, children, parents, partners, and the council.

Cllr Shabir Pandor, Kirklees Cabinet member for school catering, said “We’re delighted that our service has achieved the Silver Food For Life Catering Mark for school meals. Our silver award means that we are providing children with incredibly high standards of healthy, nutritious meals.

Supporting our local schools in addressing children’s health and classroom attainment is at the core of what we do and this award is testament to that.”

Tips and advice:

“Using the framework of the Catering Mark/ Food for Life Partnership has been a tool to help us gain the trust and confidence of the schools, partners and local communities we work with. We believe that having developed these relationships will go onto help us when working with schools to implement the UIFSM project. In terms of the UIFSM project we are finding that using fresh, seasonal foods is giving us more flexibility to deal with pressures created with increasing uptake and storage.”

