

Improving the lunchtime experience

Southville Primary School, Bristol

School Background

Southville Primary School is close to the City of Bristol. There are approximately 200 pupils in the school with an additional 40 children in the Nursery. It serves a mainly White British community and there are an increasing proportion of pupils in the schools who speak English as an additional language. The school gained National Healthy School Status in 2008 and joined the South West Healthy School Plus programme when it was apparent that NCMP data for reception and year 6 children in the ward of Southville was above average.

Context: 10% FSM, 27% SEN (SA and SAP), 2% EAL

What needs were identified?

Using information gathered through the Healthy Schools Audit tool one of the areas the school decided to focus on was that of emotional health and well-being in the context of the lunchtime dining experience.

The small hall that is used for children having a school dinner was not a very pleasant room. Being an old Grade II listed building the décor was varied and being in it was quite a depressing; with

peeling paint and damp patches and a mismatch of colours that were faded and old fashioned. The high ceilings added to the poor acoustics of the room and children were rushing through their meal to reduce the time they had to spend in the dining hall. In a student council letter to the Friends of the Southville Primary association, requesting support for funding, the children simply stated, “ We are writing to tell you that the dining room is quite dull at the moment and we have excellent plans to brighten it up!.....”

What outcomes did the school focus on?

The school wanted to increase the number of children (eating a school dinner) who reported having a more positive dining experience.

A baseline survey was taken on four different days throughout September, October and November. A board was put up outside the dining hall and children could tick one of three faces to demonstrate their dining experience. The children were reminded that this was not asking if they had enjoyed their school dinner but rather if they had had a positive or negative experience during their dining time. Not all children completed the survey.

Dining experience baseline survey:

Total number having lunch	positive dining experience 😊	OK dining experience 😐	Negative dining experience 😞
Day 1 - 38	12	8	4
Day 2 - 48	15	11	5
Day 3 - 44	7	9	9
Day 4 - 51	17	12	9

On average over the four days 29% had expressed they had had a positive experience and 16% a negative experience.

The school decided to look at the number of children eating a school dinner to see if the intervention had had any impact on the take up of school meals, although this was not the intended outcome but could be an interesting comparison.

One of the key priorities for the school was to allow lunchtime to be a time for sitting at a table to eat, not being in a rush being able to socialise with friends and other children.

What activities / interventions were put into place?

The student council were given a lead role in this work and at a meeting discussed what they would like the dining experience to be like. The student council listed lots of ideas and suggested ways of improving the dining room so that it would become a more pleasant space. They were then tasked with finding out additional ideas from their individual classes. The student council members include children in Key stage 1 and so the whole school were consulted through the student council.

A reoccurring and popular suggestion was for there to be an American Diner theme to the hall. Children set to work designing the room and using some of the Healthy Schools plus funding began to select some furniture for the room.



Children's plans of the dining room; showing the newly painted serving hatch, the chequered flooring and the high top eating bar, with high stools.

Once the theme had been selected and plans put to the rest of the school the children began to fund raise in order to raise enough money for the changes to be made. The school musicians held a 'busking' session in the playground, where parents could make a donation and any profit from the healthy tuck shop (another Healthy School Plus priority area) went into the dining hall refurbishment pot.

Fortunately new flooring was being laid elsewhere in the school and negotiations led to new black and white checked flooring to be laid in the dining hall. The walls were painted brilliant white and the wood work a bright red gloss.

A Juke-Box was installed and a raised eating bar with high stools added to the transformation. It was decided that the high stools would be for Year 5 and 6 children only!

The final phase of the dining hall revamp is in sight; polka dot table cloths and red chairs are on order and will complete the American style diner.

What was achieved and how did the school know?

Initial survey showed that:-
13 out of 45 reported enjoying their dining experience

The school's target was:-
20 out of 45 reported enjoying their dining experience

The final survey showed that:-
29 out of 49 children reported enjoying their lunchtime dining experience (29 happy, 14 neutral and 6 did not enjoy)

The deputy head says:
"I've noticed that children now linger in the school dining room until about 12.40pm. Previously they were eating their lunch as fast as possible and leaving at 12.20pm."



Year 4 boy says:
"It's really cool now!"

One year 1 girl says:
"I used to hate lunchtimes, now I have the best lunchtimes ever!"

What next?

The Healthy Schools Plus coordinator would like to run a Year 6 Art project with a view to producing some 'Andy Warhol' style images that can be made into large canvasses to hang in the dining hall. These would also serve as a method of absorbing some of the noise, due to the high ceiling.

At the moment the children are served their dinner on a 'flight tray'. Ideally the school would like to reintroduce plates, if not china, then a good quality plastic!



And finally..... the Healthy Schools Plus coordinator is interested in initiating a family serving technique where salad bowls are available on each table and the children can serve each other, thus nurturing an ethos of communal dining and experiencing lunchtime as a social event and not just a practical activity to re-fuel!