



The Oval Primary – a whole school approach to health and wellbeing

The Oval Primary in Birmingham is a shining example of a school that has fully integrated the Food for Life Partnership across its school curriculum for the benefit of the children. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is twice the national average; over a third of pupils have learning difficulties and almost half are from minority ethnic groups.

The school was judged 'Outstanding' in a 2010 Ofsted survey of its personal, social and health education provision, and it was noted that the school's FFLP activities successfully and actively engaged staff, pupils and parents in "improving the quality of food across the school and beyond".

Headteacher Rachel Chahal says, *"Food has such a huge impact on the children. Learning about what they eat – or should eat – is just so important for their physical, personal and intellectual development. Children at The Oval understand where food comes from, not because they've read about it, but because they've actually seen it first-hand."*

"Our school meal take-up has increased 7.8% since joining the Food for Life Partnership because our food is such high quality and the children have a lot of input. Parents appreciate that and so do the children. The result is the children! They're positive, noticeably happy, contented and keen to learn. In the future, when they think back to their time at school, they'll have vivid memories because their learning has been linked to food, from growing to cooking and tasting it."

Since enrolling with FFLP, the school has invested in a dedicated cooking room and a full-time cookery teacher; the school cook also holds after-school cooking clubs with pupils and parents, to provide guidance on preparing fresh and healthy dishes.

Rachel adds, *"Children love to cook, especially with their parents. We have had a great take up of the 'dads and children' sessions."*

“Parents are in charge of food budgeting and shopping at home, so without the parents involved Food for Life principles could be only for our pupils. If we really want them to live healthily and practice this at home, we have to get Food for Life values into the home.”

All of the school meals are freshly prepared and include organic and/or seasonal produce, some of which is grown in the school allotment. All pupils are involved in planting, harvesting and maintaining the allotment and surplus organic produce grown on site is sold to parents.

In a great example of how the school is involving the local community, the school's allotment manager started out as an interested parent. She now has her own allotment and manages one and a half allotment plots for the school. Every day, pupils help her with planting a range of vegetables, fruit and some flowers. A learning experience, the pupils experiment with crops and crop rotation to see what works and what doesn't work.

Following the success of The Oval, Birmingham City Council caterer City Serve has committed to making Food for Life accredited Bronze, Silver or Gold menus available to all of their schools.

‘Fish week’ – a whole school food event:

The Oval’s ‘Fish Week’ is a fantastic example of how a school can involve both pupils and the wider community in food education around a specific theme and brings the Food for Life Partnership criteria on food provenance to life.

During the week, the main school hall was transformed into a fish market with a hands-on learning area. The activities included:

- Interactive learning through ‘fishy facts’. A paddling pool was filled with cut out fish shapes holding interesting fish facts for children to catch and read.
- Pupils were able to dress up as a Fisherman and use life jackets and uniform for practical role-play. They were also given hands on experience of how fish is caught using net, rod and creel.
- The school organised an after school session for parents with Waitrose Fish Specialists to give advice. This gave parents the opportunity to try different types of fish as well as learning more about choosing sustainable varieties.
- A competition was held for parents - Fish Market 'Name that Fish'. Fresh fish was placed on display – supported by Waitrose – and parents were asked to identify them in order of popularity. Prizes of an organic food hamper and vouchers were given for those with the most correct answers.
- A Fishing Game competition was held for children, with prizes of cooking sets for the winners.
- During the week, one hundred recipe booklets were handed out alongside recipe sheets plus colouring-in, information and interactive games from the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC).

A Marine Science Adviser also spent two days with the school to support science-based learning for pupils.

Notes:

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