



CONNECTS-FOOD

A FREE RESOURCE



September 2022

CONNECTS-Food is funded by the MRC Public health intervention development scheme ref MR/V003860/1

INTRODUCTION

Children consume a third of their food at school, providing an opportunity to promote healthy diets and reduce levels of obesity. The World Health Organisation and UK government recommend that schools adopt approaches across the whole school day that support children to make healthy food choices, offering consistency in the quality of foods provided, eating culture, education about diet, and use of food to learn.

Adopting a whole school approach to food can bring benefits to children, their families and your school.

The CONNECTS Food resource has been developed by school stakeholders (headteachers, school staff, caterers, dietitians, parents and representatives from local authority and school food organisations) alongside academics from University of York, Queens University Belfast, Newcastle University, University of Bradford and the University of Leeds with the support of Public Health England and the Department for Education. This research is funded by the Medical Research Council.

To find out more visit: connects-food.com

PRIORITIES OF SCHOOL LEADERS

- Ensure sufficient priority is given to child health and well-being in addition to child education
- Tie in whole school approach activities to other priorities such as environmental priorities (e.g. eating more veg, less waste, locally sourced food, meat free options, less packaged foods etc.).
- Lead your school's whole school approach to food strategy alongside senior leadership team, teachers, caterers, parents and school governors
- Appoint a named school food champion(s) to monitor achievement of whole school approach to food strategy (including school council rep) - ensuring it is on the agenda of all leadership and governor meetings
- Ensure lunch and kitchen staff are key members of the team and involve them in other areas of the school day e.g., reading to children or delivering cooking lessons
- Monitor uptake of school meals and encourage uptake from all children and consider making school meals compulsory for new school year intakes

FOOD CURRICULUM

- Review existing catering contract to ensure high quality food and value for money
- Upskill kitchen staff to ensure food is healthy, tasty and culturally appropriate including high quality meat free options
- Hold focus groups with children to design menus, then work with caterers to ensure it meets nutritional guidelines

SCHOOL FOOD PROVISION

- Make time for teachers to attend training/professional development on how to incorporate food into existing curriculum
- Assign named teacher be a 'food champion', to lead on incorporating food into the curriculum across all core subjects e.g. science, maths, PSHE)
- Explore funding avenues for purchasing additional cooking ingredients and kitchen resources e.g. catering companies and food suppliers who often have pots of money available for public engagement
- Explore subscribing/enrolling onto to educational package e.g., TastEd, Food for life, rethink food
- Use cooking and growing as part of the curriculum, including composting and food waste initiatives

SCHOOL FOOD POLICY & CULTURE

- Consider introducing policies on: non-food rewards, uniform free day on birthdays, dessert free lunches, healthy celebration foods and removal of 'chip Fridays' etc.
- Involve parents and children in developing and implementing school food policies (see stakeholder engagement)
- Take part in national initiatives such as '5 a day' or 'health week', or reward initiatives such as 'food for life' or 'eco-schools' ensuring that the whole school is involved
- Ensure that messages about food are consistent across the day (e.g. ensuring lessons about healthy eating are not overshadowed by rewards with sweets)
- Organise food-based school trips e.g. sustainable farms and supermarkets to support learning about food and the food system

DINING EXPERIENCE

- Extend lunch break to reduce queues and give more time to eat in non-rushed environment
- Ensure headteachers and teachers are visible in the dining space to eat alongside the children
- Ensure kitchen and lunchtime staff encourage children to try new and healthy foods
- Adapt eating space to offer a vibrant and appealing atmosphere to eat (e.g., provision of well stocked salad or fruit bar).
- Provide the opportunity for children to select where they sit, including packed lunch children eating with school lunches

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

- Involve parents in whole school approach to food decisions including development of policies (including healthy packed lunches and snacks) and encouraging key messages to be mirrored at home
- Ensure lunch and kitchen staff are key members of the team and involve them in other areas of the school day e.g., reading to children or delivering cooking lessons (see leadership engagement)
- Engage with wider members of the community e.g. grandparents, allotment growers and fruit and veg sellers to develop growing and cooking lessons/education
- Consider developing a food ambassador group (or similar child led committee for food) to seek their opinions on school food provision, eating environments and other food related decisions

PASTORAL CARE

- Use food events as a way to bring families and local community together to build social cohesion e.g., religious festivals, school lunch events
- Provide staff training on eating behaviours of concern and how to approach parents if needed
- Consider ways to make free school meals and paid school lunches indistinguishable from each other
- Enlist a dedicated member of staff who supports vulnerable families, including support in identifying eligibility and claiming free school meals
- Consider providing facilities and / or staff for the Holiday Activities and Food programme during school closure