

School Meals

Transforming a Feeding Culture into an Eating Culture

Two thirds of primary school pupils in Scotland eat school meals¹. School meals provide a unique opportunity to drive the dietary change we need in Scotland and act as an exemplar for healthy eating.

The school dining experience across Scotland varies dramatically. We found that Scottish **primary schools** frequently offer salad bars and salad bowls but serve puddings more often than soup and frequently serve red and processed meat. More consistency is required to have a positive influence on the health of children growing up across the whole of Scotland.

We are asking national and local government to place greater value on school meals as a vehicle to foster a healthy and happy experience around food.

Recommendations for Action

01



Use unprocessed or minimally processed foods wherever possible

02



Prioritise vegetables, soup and salads over puddings

03



The free sugar content of school meals should move towards the new Scottish Dietary Goals

04



Create a positive physical and social environment for school meals

¹ The Scottish Government Summary statistics for attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living, 2016.



Prioritising Natural and Minimally Processed Food

The overriding principle in designing and preparing school meals should be to use unprocessed or minimally processed foods.

Reduce or eliminate any highly processed foods (incl. processed meat) and limit red meat in school meals. The presence of such food (e.g. hot dogs, chicken nuggets, burgers, chips and pizza) infers that they are acceptable on a daily basis and exposes children to the habit of consuming these types of food.

DEMONSTRATING PROGRESS

East Lothian Council offered red and processed meat on only one day of the week. Two councils (Clackmannanshire and Aberdeen City Council) offered red and processed meat on two days a week only.



Prioritising Soup and Vegetables

Prioritise vegetables, soup and salads over puddings

Soup and salad can provide multiple portions of vegetables per sitting. Currently just over 50% of local authorities offer soup on 4 or 5 days of the week. 6 authorities offer soup only once a week or not at all. 27 local authorities offer salad bars or bowls in addition to their standard vegetable offering. Scottish Primary Schools serve puddings more often than soup and 50% of local authorities are practising a "soup or pudding" alternative. The nutritional characteristics of these are not equal and **this practice should cease immediately.**

DEMONSTRATING PROGRESS

Glasgow City Council and South Ayrshire Council offer soup and salad bar/bowls on every day of the week and don't have a 'soup or pudding' ultimatum. Scottish Borders Council offer soups 4 days a week, salad bar/bowl every day and don't have a 'soup or pudding' choice.



Free Sugar Content of School Meals

The free sugar content of school meals should be reduced over time to meet the updated SACN recommendations² and the Scottish Dietary Goals³.

An average school pudding has over 3 teaspoons of sugar (14g). The average yogurt served in school meals are low in fat but have high sugar content – 3 teaspoons of sugar (12.7g). Offering such puddings at school makes it almost impossible for children to stay within the range of their daily recommendations. To achieve the Scottish Dietary Goals, any **puddings, cakes, biscuits and sugary yogurts should be minimised on school menus.** This change will help to form healthy eating habits from a young age.

DEMONSTRATING PROGRESS

Edinburgh City Council (Edinburgh Catering) offer puddings on only 2 days a week and provide nutritional information that their yogurts have 3g of sugar per portion.



Calculation of Nutritional Values of School Meals

Currently, regulations allow the nutritional value of a school meal to be averaged across the weekly offering. However this appears to mask some very high daily offerings in sugar.

By way of an example from a current menu: a lunch of sweet and sour chicken (free sugars 6.6g), a lemon sponge (19.2g), and a strawberry milkshake (10.6g) could provide over 36g of free sugars. **This is close to double the maximum daily intake for children aged 4 - 6 (19g).**

We strongly recommend that a third of the SACN maximum daily limit on free sugar is applied to every potential combination of school meal options. This could be implemented over time.



The Dining Experience: Building a Healthy Eating Culture

The experience of a school meal is crucial as it may determine whether pupils choose to eat at school. Lunchtime is an opportunity to take a break from the lessons, socialise with friends, build relationships across school and learn about other cultures and dietary needs (i.e. food allergies and national dishes).

We must positively influence children's diets in school and this must include consideration of the dining experience so that school meals are delivered in **positive and vibrant physical and social environments.**

² Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN), Carbohydrates and Health, 2015

³ The Scottish Government, Revised Scottish Dietary Goals, March 2016