

# **Scrutiny Inquiry Panel - Tackling Childhood Obesity in Southampton**

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND PRESENTATIONS**

Tuesday, 28th January, 2020  
at 5.30 pm

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION RELATED TO THE LISTED  
REPORTS

# **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND PRESENTATIONS**

Monday, 20 January 2020

DIRECTOR, LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE

- **Introduction**
- **Early Years Award**
- **0-19 Healthy Weight Presentation**
- **City Catering Southampton**
- **LifeLab**

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SCRUTINY INQUIRY PANEL - TACKLING CHILDHOOD OBESITY IN SOUTHAMPTON  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 DECEMBER 2019

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Present: Councillors Coombs, Harwood, Houghton, Professor Margetts, McEwing and T Thomas

Apologies: Councillor Vaughan

7. **APOLOGIES AND CHANGES IN PANEL MEMBERSHIP (IF ANY)**

The apologies of Councillor Vaughan were noted.

8. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (INCLUDING MATTERS ARISING)**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2019 be approved and signed as a correct record.

9. **UNDERSTANDING LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES ON CHILDHOOD OBESITY - THE ACTIVE ENVIRONMENT**

The Panel considered the report of the Director, Legal and Governance requesting that the Panel consider the comments made by the invited guests and use the information provided as evidence in the review.

Following discussion with invited representatives the following information was received:

**An overview of physical activity levels in children and young people – Ravita Taheem on behalf of Helen Fisher, Strategic Lead for Physical Activity and Health, Energise Me**

- A presentation was provided by Helen Fisher giving an overview on levels of physical activity of children and young people in Southampton.
- Key points raised in the presentation included the following:
  - The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Physical Activity Strategy includes an aim to 'Inspire our children and young people to form an active habit for life' and 'improve levels of physical activity among children and young people'.
  - Chief Medical Officer guidelines recommends 180 minutes a day of physical activity for 0-5 year olds (nationally only 9% of 2-4 year olds are meeting the target) and 60 minutes average per day across the week for 5-18 years.
  - 2018/19 - % of Children and Young People doing 60 mins a day - Nationally 19.6%, Hampshire 18.3%, Southampton 18.3%
  - 2018/19 - % of Children and Young People doing **an average** of 60 mins a day - Nationally 46.8%, Hampshire 43.4%, Southampton 40%
  - 2018/19 - 30 minutes of Sport and Physical Activity at school all years 1-11 - Nationally 40.4%, Hampshire 35.2%, Southampton 36.7%
  - 2018/19 - 30 minutes of Sport and Physical Activity outside school all years 1-11 - Nationally 57.2%, Hampshire 56.5%, Southampton 47.8%
  - There are still insufficient numbers reaching the 60 minutes a day target.

- Significant and stubborn inequalities remain in areas of deprivation, gender and race.
- Energise Me is working together to support schools to build physical activity into their school day through Active initiatives: Active Bursts, Active Learning, Active Travel, Active Playtime and outside school through Active Home.

**Healthy Places: how planning can support healthy weight environments – Angela Baker, Deputy Director for Health and Wellbeing, Public Health England South East**

- A presentation was delivered by Angela Baker on the role that planning can play in supporting a healthy weight environment.
- Key points raised in the presentation included the following:
  - A healthy-weight environment supports people in avoiding becoming overweight or obese through the way in which a place is designed and the facilities it provides.
  - The planning system has a range of powers which can help create and support healthy weight environments.
  - Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) can use tools such as local plan policies, Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), design codes, planning conditions, Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) and developer contributions to help create and support healthy weight environments, modifying the environment so that it supports being active and does not promote sedentary behaviour or provide easy access to energy-dense food.
  - Six elements to help achieve healthy weight environments through planning process: These are movement & access, open spaces, recreation & play, food environment, neighbourhood spaces, building design & local economy.
  - Key features of these elements are creating places that prioritise walking, cycling and mass transit; provide communal spaces that support wellbeing and encourage active behaviour in children and adults; create buildings which are able to promote a healthy lifestyle, such as building homes with kitchens big enough for people to store, prepare and cook meals and eat together.
  - Leeds have developed a planning framework that requires takeaways to give people healthier choices, calories on menus and they have banned high sugar and high caffeine drinks in takeaways in areas near schools. Licensing funding has been used to police premises.
  - Brighton and Hove Council developed a drinks levy before the national policy. Money recovered was invested into physical activity initiatives by the council.
  - These approaches are part of a long term culture change required to change attitudes to obesity (following successful change in attitude to smoking).
  - It is important that a whole systems approach is taken to promote healthy weight, including encouraging physical activity and other actions, to help reverse the obesity epidemic.
  - Local authorities can provide local leadership and take positive action to promote a healthy weight environment by taking a coherent approach

across all their relevant functions, including sport and leisure, planning, transport, public health, social care and economic development.

- Such an integrated and place-based approach is demonstrated through the TCPA Planning Healthy Weight Environments and the NHS England Healthy New Towns guidance. Additional guidance from PHE for Local Authorities, Public Health and Planning Teams on 'using the planning system to promote healthy weight environments' is currently in development.

### **Southampton City Vision Local Plan: contributing to health – Paul Barton, Interim Service Lead for Infrastructure, Planning and Development**

- A presentation was delivered by Paul Barton outlining how the Southampton City Vision Local Plan will contribute to health in the city.
- Key points raised in the presentation included the following:
  - Planning decisions, in keeping with the National Planning Policy Framework, are always a balancing act between economic, social and environmental objectives. Health is embedded within social objectives.
  - The City Council is in the process of developing a new local plan. The City Vision Local Plan, due for adoption in 2022, will set out the strategic priorities for development of the city.
  - This provides an opportunity for the facilitation of a healthy city to be a priority in the city's development.
  - A "healthy planning" specialist, funded by Public Health, is being recruited into the Planning Policy Team to ensure that health is at the forefront of planning making processes.
  - The new plan can help to improve health in the city by influencing wider determinants of health such as the quality of homes, transport, environment, jobs and infrastructure. A number of these factors can help support levels of physical activity among city residents and enhance the food environment.
  - A number of areas in the UK have been designated 'healthy towns'. Here localities are exploring how the development of new places could provide an opportunity to create healthier and connected communities with integrated and high-quality services.
  - A healthy city cannot be achieved by planning policy alone. It needs a coherent approach across relevant functions.
  - To influence the content of the local plan, including policies to help manage the increase in exposure to takeaways, it is recommended that feedback is provided during the initial stages of consultation.

### **Better Transport for a Healthy and Active City – Neil Tuck, Sustainable City Team Leader**

- A presentation was delivered by Neil Tuck providing an overview of the developments in Southampton to encourage and enable people to choose healthy and active travel options.
- Key points raised in the presentation included the following:
  - Connected Southampton, the Local Transport Strategy, influenced by Public Health, includes, under the strategic aim of 'A Better Way to Travel', the goals of supporting people to change how they move around

the city by widening their healthy and clean travel choices and encouraging them to get around actively and healthily, and helping Southampton become a zero emission city.

- To deliver policy objective significant resources being invested in delivering a cycle network. Completed Western corridor – 20% uplift in people cycling.
- Alongside physical infrastructure changes an engagement & behaviour change programme targeting those who want to change / those whose change will create the most impact is being delivered. Focus is on new school starters, building cycling confidence and competence, with priority given to schools near core corridors / areas of poor air quality.
- In 2018/19 53 Southampton schools engaged in the programme - an active travel rate of 88% was achieved in 13 selected schools.
- Metamorphosis, EU funded programme, developing an ethos of child-friendly neighbourhoods and streets that are conducive to walking and cycling, and reducing motor car use.
- Neighbourhood trials – community and school street closures.
- A trial street closure by St Marys Primary School, a school where obesity levels for year 6 pupils are above the city average (one of the reasons for choosing this site) had positive results. 93% supported more regular closures. We are now working to implement a long term School Street trial with physical measure for times closure at St Marys.
- Introducing a Healthy Streets assessment tool to integrate health outcomes into the assessment for evaluating projects (utilised by TfL).
- Working with local communities to develop Active Travel Zones (ATZs) in neighbourhoods so people can walking and cycle easily and safely.
- Creating safe spaces, routes, changing roads, landscaping, cycle parking and links to main corridors.
- Transforming Cities Fund - £1.8bn pot – We are awaiting announcement regarding funding award for bid by Southampton and Hampshire.
- Three year programme - runs from April 2020 to March 2023. If significant award big opportunity to improve sustainable and active travel in Southampton; to do large scale transformative schemes; progress ATZs, Quiet Zones and access to school; and transforming people's journeys by bike and public transport.
- Working with University of Southampton to evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives and develop evidence base.
- Modal shift is happening but changing travel habits and culture is a long term, gradual process.

### **What role can parks and green spaces play? – Lindsay McCulloch, Technical Team Leader Environment and Ecology**

- A presentation was delivered by Lindsay McCulloch on Southampton's parks and open spaces.
- Key points raised in the presentation included the following:
  - Access to green space has been linked with reduced levels of obesity in children and young people.
  - A positive correlation between distance to green space and childhood obesity levels has been identified.

- Living in areas with green spaces can reduce effect of deprivation on health.
- Good access across Southampton to parks and green spaces. However, a large proportion of the most densely populated areas are more than 300m from a 2 hectare site (smallest size for a decent walk).
- Formal and informal sports, play and wildlife activities for children are delivered in the parks.
- Few unaccompanied children playing on semi-natural greenspaces in the city. Possible reflection of parental sense of risk. Leading to lack of confidence in green spaces, particularly evident in children from the city's council estates.
- Tailored interventions which increase the interest in green spaces for disadvantaged areas are required.
- Schools have the opportunity to introduce children to green spaces in lessons. The offer needs to be right for them.

**RESOLVED** that the comments and presentations made by Helen Fisher, Strategic Lead for Physical Activity and Health, Energise Me, Angela Baker, Deputy Director for Health and Wellbeing, Public Health England South East, Paul Barton, Interim Service Lead for Infrastructure, Planning and Development, Neil Tuck, Sustainable City Team Leader, and Lindsay McCulloch, Technical Team Leader Environment and Ecology be noted and used as evidence in the review.

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# Agenda Item 7

<b>DECISION-MAKER:</b>	SCRUTINY INQUIRY PANEL		
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	UNDERSTANDING THE RANGE OF LOCAL PROGRAMMES CURRENTLY UNDERWAY TO ADDRESS CHILDHOOD OBESITY		
<b>DATE OF DECISION:</b>	28 JANUARY 2020		
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	DIRECTOR – LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE		
<b><u>CONTACT DETAILS</u></b>			
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<b>STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY</b>			
None			
<b>BRIEF SUMMARY</b>			
<p>In accordance with the inquiry plan, for the fourth meeting of the ‘Tackling childhood obesity in Southampton Inquiry’ the Panel will be considering the range of local programmes currently underway to address childhood obesity. Key issues to be discussed include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the programmes for obesity prevention in the early years in Southampton?</li> <li>• What are the programmes for obesity prevention in schools in Southampton?</li> <li>• Examples of good practice in the approach to food and catering at school.</li> </ul>			
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS:</b>			
	(i)	The Panel is recommended to consider the comments made by the invited guests and use the information provided as evidence in the review.	
<b>REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS</b>			
1.	To enable the Panel to compile a file of evidence in order to formulate findings and recommendations at the end of the review process.		
<b>ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED</b>			
2.	None		
<b>DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)</b>			
3.	For the fourth meeting of the inquiry the Panel will be developing their understanding of the range of local programmes currently underway to address childhood obesity.		
4.	A number of guests have been invited to provide the Panel with an insight into the issues:		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Darrin Hunter</b>, Assistant Team Manager, Early Years and Childcare and <b>Angela Elliott</b>, Early Years Development Worker, will provide the Panel with an overview of the steps being taken to support the provision of healthy food and opportunities to be physically active in Early Years settings in Southampton.</li> <li>• <b>Vicki Pennal</b>, Health Visitor – Healthy Settings &amp; Project Lead 0-19, Solent NHS Trust, <b>Carol Bralee</b>, Specialist Public Health Nurse and <b>Sophie Ruffles</b>, Health Visitor will describe the pathway to healthy weight from Pre-birth to 16 years detailing all of the steps (including the Healthy High 5 award) along the way for Southampton children.</li> <li>• <b>Sarah Doling</b> – Menu Development Manager, City Catering Southampton. City Catering provide school meals for a number of schools across Southampton. Sarah will provide the Panel with an overview of the work City Catering are doing, and associated challenges, to enable schools to comply with school food standards.</li> <li>• <b>Dr Kathryn Woods-Townsend</b> - LifeLab Programme Manager at the University of Southampton. LifeLab is a novel educational intervention designed to empower secondary school pupils through science enquiry to understand the consequences of lifestyle choices on their own health.</li> </ul>
5.	To provide appropriate context to the discussion a number of appendices have been attached to this report. Appendices 1 and 2 provide an overview of the Southampton Health Early Year Awards whilst Appendix 3 references an example of best practice with regards to food and school meals. Finally Appendix 4 summarises the findings from a recent study by the University of Leeds into the nutritional quality of children’s packed lunches across primary schools in England.
6.	The guests invited to present information at the meeting will take questions from the Panel relating to the evidence provided. Copies of any presentations will be made available to the Panel.
<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>	
<b><u>Capital/Revenue</u></b>	
7.	N/A
<b><u>Property/Other</u></b>	
8.	N/A
<b>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b>	
<b><u>Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:</u></b>	
9.	The duty to undertake overview and scrutiny is set out in Part 1A Section 9 of the Local Government Act 2000.
<b><u>Other Legal Implications:</u></b>	
10.	None
<b>RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS</b>	

11.	None
<b>POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS</b>	
12.	None
<b>KEY DECISION</b>	No
<b>WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:</b>	None directly as a result of this report
<b><u>SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION</u></b>	
<b>Appendices</b>	
1.	Southampton Healthy Early Years Award
2.	Map of the Providers who have completed a Healthy Early Years Award
3.	Educating Magazine – Article on Park Community School from June 2018
4.	Children’s packed lunches lack nutritional quality – A study by the University of Leeds
<b>Documents In Members’ Rooms</b>	
1.	None
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	
Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality and Safety Impact Assessments (ESIA) to be carried out?	No
<b>Data Protection Impact Assessment</b>	
Do the implications/subject of the report require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to be carried out?	No
<b>Other Background Documents: Equality Impact Assessment and Other Background documents available for inspection at:</b>	
Title of Background Paper(s)	Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)
1.	

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### **Southampton Healthy Early Years Award**

Undertaking the Healthy Early Years Award offers a unique opportunity for early years and childcare settings to work towards a quality assured programme, helping to improve the health and wellbeing for under 5s and their families.

Helping families to make healthier choices remains a national focus. In Southampton, obesity rates are similar to the England average, and these levels are unacceptably high. Therefore, addressing obesity, through healthier nutrition and physical activity choices, in addition to improving oral health, is a priority for the city.

Participating in the award helps providers to provide a healthier environment for children in their care. It helps families to make positive choices and provides practical support for early year's practitioners. Completing the award provides clear and consistent messages to parents /carers and children on healthy eating, oral health and physical activity to benefit the home environment.

Southampton's HEYA was originally developed in 2009, and in 2017 was redesigned and piloted to make it more accessible and practical to achieve. There are six stand-alone awards at three progressive levels: Bronze, Silver and Gold.

The award, which is offered free of charge to early years and childcare providers, is coordinated by the Early Years and Childcare team, with oversight from Public Health.

Since the award was revised in 2017 thirty nurseries and preschools, and eight childminders have achieved a bronze award. In this period three settings have achieved a silver award in Healthy Eating, five settings in Physical Activity, and eight settings have achieved the silver Healthy Mouths' award. One early year's provider completed their Gold award in December 2019.

Comments from providers who have completed an award include: "*Really positive feedback from parents and (we've) seen a real change in the content of the children's lunchboxes.*"

*'It's made all the staff reflect on what they do with the children', 'children really enjoy the wake- and- shake activities'*

*And "we really enjoyed completing the bronze healthy eating award and have noticed a positive impact on the setting in regards to food being offered and provided from home."*

A film was produced in autumn 2019 to help people to find out more about the award [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcW\\_QMmUksQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcW_QMmUksQ) .

### **Outdoor play project**

In addition, practitioners and leaders from ten early years' settings have taken part in an Explore the Outdoors play project, working alongside a SCC Play Development Coordinator and an Outdoor Play worker, to explore what is currently being provided in early years, what is working well and what support practitioners would like to further develop their outdoor learning environment. Sessions were held at Green Lane Copse, on Weston Shore and at YMCA Fairthorne, as the participants explored opportunities, including using fire, wood and water, to extend the children's outdoor experiences and to encourage more active play.

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# Providers who have completed a Healthy Early Years Award



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**STATE OF THE NATION**

New EDUCATERING research shines a light on self-managed school caterers

**EDUCATERING EXCELLENCE AWARDS**

The 2018 awards are open for entries! We want to hear about your school catering stars

**Agenda Item 7**

Could a new marketing board help more kids eating veg?

Appendix 3

# EDUCATERING

SPECIFICALLY CATERING TO THE SCHOOL MEALS MARKET

[www.educateringmagazine.co.uk](http://www.educateringmagazine.co.uk)

JUNE 2018

*Dance to your own beat*

**HOW OPERATING IN-HOUSE IS GIVING CATERERS FREEDOM AND DRIVE TO DO BETTER**

# MORE THAN JUST A SCHOOL

Park Community School near Portsmouth has established its own community farm to supply its spectacularly good in-house catering operation. Jane Renton went along to see how it works



Christopher Anders

I've said this before, and I'll say it again, we tend to view school catering through rose-tinted glasses, because rarely if ever do we get invited to schools that do not do their catering well. No-one ever rings us up and says, "Look, why don't you nip over to sample our execrable slops, we'd love a bad write-up in your mag." As Tolstoy wrote in *Anna Karenina*, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Similarly, bad caterers are bad in their own inimitable way, while good school caterers tend to be good in much the same way and that is our particular journalistic challenge in our endless quest to find the new and innovative.

Imagine my surprise then, when I visited Park Community School in Havant, Hampshire, a school entirely unknown to me, even though it is only a 15-minute drive from my own front door: I discovered a first-class catering operation but one that really does do things differently and on a grander scale. Who has honestly ever been presented in a school as I was with a homemade basil sorbet as an in-between course palate cleanser, even at Eton or Harrow? Or, for that matter, been given an opportunity to sample a school's own homemade charcuterie made from the pigs from the school's two-acre smallholding?

We may have visited great school kitchens, seen their herb gardens, admired their bed of homegrown vegetables and elucked with delight at Maisie and Jessie their pet hens, but Park Community, a mixed co-educational secondary school with close on 900 pupils, is exceptional, even by those yardsticks. So far, pupils, staff and the kitchen team have raised some 80 pigs, prepared the ground in readiness for a second polytunnel of vegetables, tended to the school's pet pygmy goats, looked after the quails and collected their tiny eggs, and helped establish several hives for honey bees.

The farm is a small rural idyll in perfect harmony with much of the rest of Hampshire, the home of Jane Austen, famous for its enchanting countryside, coastline and relative affluence. Except that Park Community School is none of

those things: it is sited in Leigh Park, which constitutes Europe's second largest public housing estate, and is notorious for its high levels of deprivation. About half of all the school's pupils qualify for Pupil Premium funding.

Those social and economic disadvantages, however, co-exist with high aspiration. The school's head teacher, Christopher Anders, and his team are ambitious for their pupils. Their strategy is to create the right balance between the demands of the national curriculum and the type of wider education that more privileged children often take for granted; the extra-curricular cultural and educational experiences and trips that broaden the mind, instil confidence and prepare young people for adult life. Those are things that are not necessarily reflected in Ofsted inspections, though Park Community School is rated as 'good' by inspectors who are confined to examination of government prescribed targets.

Park Community is in Christopher's words "much more than just a school" – a phrase that is now the school's official slogan. Ultimately, the goal is to confound patronising, preconceived notions of what children from poorer and sometimes troubled backgrounds can achieve.

The Pupil Premium, which brings in an additional £400,000 of funding a year, is part of that. It allows the school to provide trips, which parents contribute to albeit at a significantly subsidised rate. Pupils from the school recently went to Tanzania and next year's Year 11s are already saving to visit New York. But educational and cultural trips nearer to home, which are often delivered free of charge, also play an important role.

"Our governors will and do spend money to allow us to do things like that," says Christopher.

The farm and the kitchen form an important part of the mix. Even a modest smallholding can teach you about animal husbandry, good land stewardship, the impact of climate and environment and the rural economy. It also teaches you patience and the importance of rearing – and killing – animals compassionately for food and sustenance.

"It teaches you patience and the importance of rearing – and killing – animals compassionately for food and sustenance"

The farm evolved from a decision taken in 2014 to take the school catering in-house from Hampshire County Council. The school wanted more flexibility over its kitchen and was frustrated at not being able to use any of its catering equipment outside school meal hours to teach pupils, for example, how to cook.

By 2014, the new school food standards were being introduced and after a frustrating hunt by the school's business manager Susan Parish to find out just how much such a service would cost for them to run themselves, the school decided it would run its own competitive tender, with several chefs and catering managers applying for the post.

"We ran the final selection based on Ready Steady Cook and it became apparent to us that what we really wanted was a chef rather than a catering manager.

The successful candidate was Steven Cross, an experienced chef who had worked in a number of top Hampshire restaurants, including JSW in Petersfield. During his training he had also worked at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle. He later appointed a sous chef, Alex Moody, and most recently another chef, Jayne Rogers.

This is a relatively expensive approach, but Steven has introduced many ideas that also generate revenues for the school, such as an event catering food wagon and consultancy services to neighbouring schools. He was also

inspired by chefs who grew their own produce, such as Raymond Blanc.

“Steven wanted to develop a smallholding where children could learn about food production and growing,” explains Christopher.

It has been a challenging project: it was difficult finding a suitable plot, and then once finding it, discovering that a low hanging phone cable across the field would delay the establishment of a portacabin site office and toilet by almost a year. Nevertheless, a proper kitchen garden is now well established, with a second polytunnel of vegetables currently being planned. The farm is five miles from the school and involves ferrying children to and from the site by one or both of the school’s mini-buses. It also involves the site team and teachers in a great deal of extra-curricular activity during evenings, weekends and holidays – an inconvenience perhaps, but one the school is prepared to countenance so great are the perceived benefits.

“We could do a lot more, but funds are limited,” says Christopher. “Our site team has to go up to the smallholding morning and evening to feed and tend to the pigs.”

The school’s chickens are tended by pupils and staff on the school’s main site in Leigh Park, along with a covey of quails. The hens’ eggs tend to be sold to staff, parents and visitors to raise additional funds, while the quails’ eggs tend to be sold to local restaurants along with charcuterie, which is by its very artisanal nature, produced in insufficient quantity for the school’s own needs.

So how has this endeavour helped the school in its core catering activities and food education activities? The answer is

**“Our site team has to go up to the smallholding morning and evening to feed and tend to the pigs”**



The school has its own pigs and children see the process from farm to plate

that it has helped wonderfully, despite the considerable extra work involved.

The food in the newly re-built kitchen and dining hall is of an extraordinarily high standard. I lunch on hot vichyssoise leek and potato soup, which is marvellous, followed by chicken with asparagus sauce, perfectly cooked carrots and green vegetables with crushed new potatoes in olive oil. No-one attending this school can possibly grow up not knowing what good food is.

But children have their own specific tastes, which is why a food ambassador group has been set up by pupils who work closely with Steven and his team to try out new foods, learn to cook various dishes and importantly report back on what fellow pupils want and think about their meals.

“We are trying to get our chefs to explore things with the children,” says Christopher. “Steven bought an ice cream maker recently, hence his home-made basil sorbet. He is also making sourdough bread for the school.”

Part of what Steven and his team do is to try and get pupils to try out new

things, but equally children tend to be conservative in their tastes. The school recently served pulled pork at lunchtime and while it went down well, pupils made clear that next time they would prefer it served in a bun.

All this and other perennial favourites with children, such as pasta dishes and filled baguettes also must be provided in menus that are changed on a three-week cycle and which are designed flexibly to take advantage of seasonal produce and good value offers from suppliers.

School meal uptake is around 50% in a school that does not allow pupils to wander up to fast food outlets during lunch breaks and while that may be respectable in terms of secondary schools, the head would like to see more pupils sitting down to a hot, cooked meal made from fresh ingredients each day. Significantly, however, turnover has increased by more than 80%, compared to what the school used to generate.

Park Community School was one of the first three secondary schools in the country to achieve a Gold Food for Life Served Here award, an incredibly



The school's Food Ambassadors

demanding attainment. Steven has won several awards for his work and was nominated in 2017 as EDUCATERING'S Secondary School Caterer of the Year.

This is a school that also operates a project called MUNCH, which provides free meals for children and families who are facing food poverty. Significantly, unlike many other feeding programmes, MUNCH runs through every school holiday, not just in the summer months. It also runs on Thursday evenings and provides one Sunday lunch monthly. The school is supported in this work by Fareshare and other organisations.

"I thought MUNCH would be very low key – just a few families showing up – but we quickly realised that mums, dads and grandparents who turned up to collect children, were hungry as well," says Christopher.

Park Community School is certainly much more than just a school. It has succeeded in turning the ordinary into something extraordinary and, thanks to the efforts of Christopher and his staff, enhanced the lives of the school's young charges.



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### **Children's packed lunches lack nutritional quality**

Fewer than two in every 100 packed lunches eaten by children in English primary schools meet nutritional standards, according to a major survey.

Although the amount of sugary food in lunchboxes declined over ten years it is still higher than recommended, and there has been a drop in essential vitamins and minerals. The University of Leeds researchers say the lack of fresh food is to blame.

With just one in five children having any vegetables or salad in their packed lunch, the researchers argue that the Government should consider making fresh vegetables freely available in schools.

They are also calling on the food industry to look at ways of making it easier for parents and carers to select healthier food options for their children.

The research compared the nutritional quality of packed lunches brought into a sample of primary schools in 2006 and then in 2016. Their results, showing how the nutritional quality of lunchboxes has changed over ten years, is published in BMJ Open (<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/10/1/e029688>).

It has been estimated that more than half of primary school children take a packed lunch to school.

Over the ten year period, the researchers found:

- Non-milk extrinsic sugars – table sugar, glucose, honey and the sugar added to food and drinks – were down from an average of 40g per lunchbox to 24g, partly as a result of fewer sugary drinks and confectionery;
- Although reduced, sugar levels in two thirds of the packed lunches were still higher than recommended, although the researchers expected the downward trend to continue as a result of the sugar levy introduced in 2018;
- On a positive note, the size of confectionery bars reduced from 37g to 31g, as a result of smaller portions made by the food industry;
- Provision of fruit and particularly vegetables remained "...stubbornly low";
- There was a reduction in the number of packed lunches meeting the standards for vitamin A, vitamin C and zinc. This was due to the lack of fresh fruit, salad and vegetables and unprocessed meat or fish;
- Many children did not have any dairy foods in their lunch, and meals did not meet the recommended standard for calcium;
- There was no reduction in saturated fats;
- There was no reduction in the portion size of crisps. The researchers say the food industry has not focused on reducing the size of savoury snacks in the same way it has on sweet snacks;

- The most common sandwich filling in both 2006 and 2016 was ham. Plant-based fillings such as humous or vegetable spreads made up less than 1% of packed lunches.

The researchers investigated whether packed lunches met the food standards that apply to cooked meals in England's schools.

Since 2006, eight standards have been introduced for cooked school lunches. Confectionery, savoury snacks and sweetened drinks are restricted while vegetables, protein and dairy have to be included in each meal.

Packed lunches, however, are not subject to any control.

The researchers found that the percentage of packed lunches meeting all eight food standards was very small, increasing slightly from 1.1% in 2006 to 1.6% over ten years.

Dr Charlotte Evans, an expert in diet and health and Associate Professor in the [School of Food Science and Nutrition](#) at Leeds, led the research.

She said: "This study underlines the role that parents, carers, the Government and the food industry have in ensuring children eat more healthily.

"In 2015, figures indicated that around one third of British 10-year-olds were obese – that is linked to what they are eating.

"The research has found that on some fronts, packed lunches have improved but they are still dominated by sweet and savoury snack food and sugary drinks. The vast majority provide poor nutritional quality. Addressing that issue over the next ten years will require a concerted effort.

"Improving what children eat at school will help reduce the risk of childhood obesity."

### **Policy response**

The researchers argue that measures to increase fruit, vegetable and water consumption are "...critically needed". They say providing free salad vegetables at primary school for children having a packed lunch could be one way to achieve this.

The researchers also believe that time constraints play a part in what parents and carers decide to put in their children's lunchboxes and that the food industry should develop more lunchbox-friendly healthy options.

Some local authorities are working with schools to improve the nutritional quality of packed lunches.

[Leeds City Council](#) is one of those local authorities.

(<https://www.leeds.gov.uk/civicEnterprise/Our%20services/catering-leeds/more-than-a-school-meal-parent-information>)

Councillor Fiona Venner, Executive Member for Children and Families, said: "Ensuring children and young people have healthy and nutritious meals is a key priority for Leeds City Council and our Health and Wellbeing service offers regular



support, advice and training for schools on how they can promote healthier packed lunches.

“In 2016, the service successfully launched a packed lunch toolkit for schools in Leeds and West Yorkshire which helps them to develop their own nutritional guidance to support parents and carers make healthy choices for their children.

“The toolkit has been designed to assist the council’s plan to continue to reduce childhood obesity levels and offers a range of resources to support schools when engaging with pupils, parents and carers.”

But across England, the researchers say there is likely to be a huge variation in the approach taken by individual schools and councils and they would like to see a national, co-ordinated policy.

Dr Evans said: “Vegetables provide a wide range of nutrients essential for children’s growth and development including fibre, vitamin C and zinc.

“Children who take a packed lunch into school are at a greater risk of not getting sufficient nutrients compared to classmates who have a school meal.

“Under supervision, even young children can prepare carrots, cucumbers and peppers to supplement their packed lunch. Vegetables and salad will remain fresh in an air-tight container for several days.”

Information on the content and weight of individual items in packed lunches was collected from 1148 children aged between eight or nine in 76 schools across England in 2006, and from 323 children of the same age in 18 schools in 2016.

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