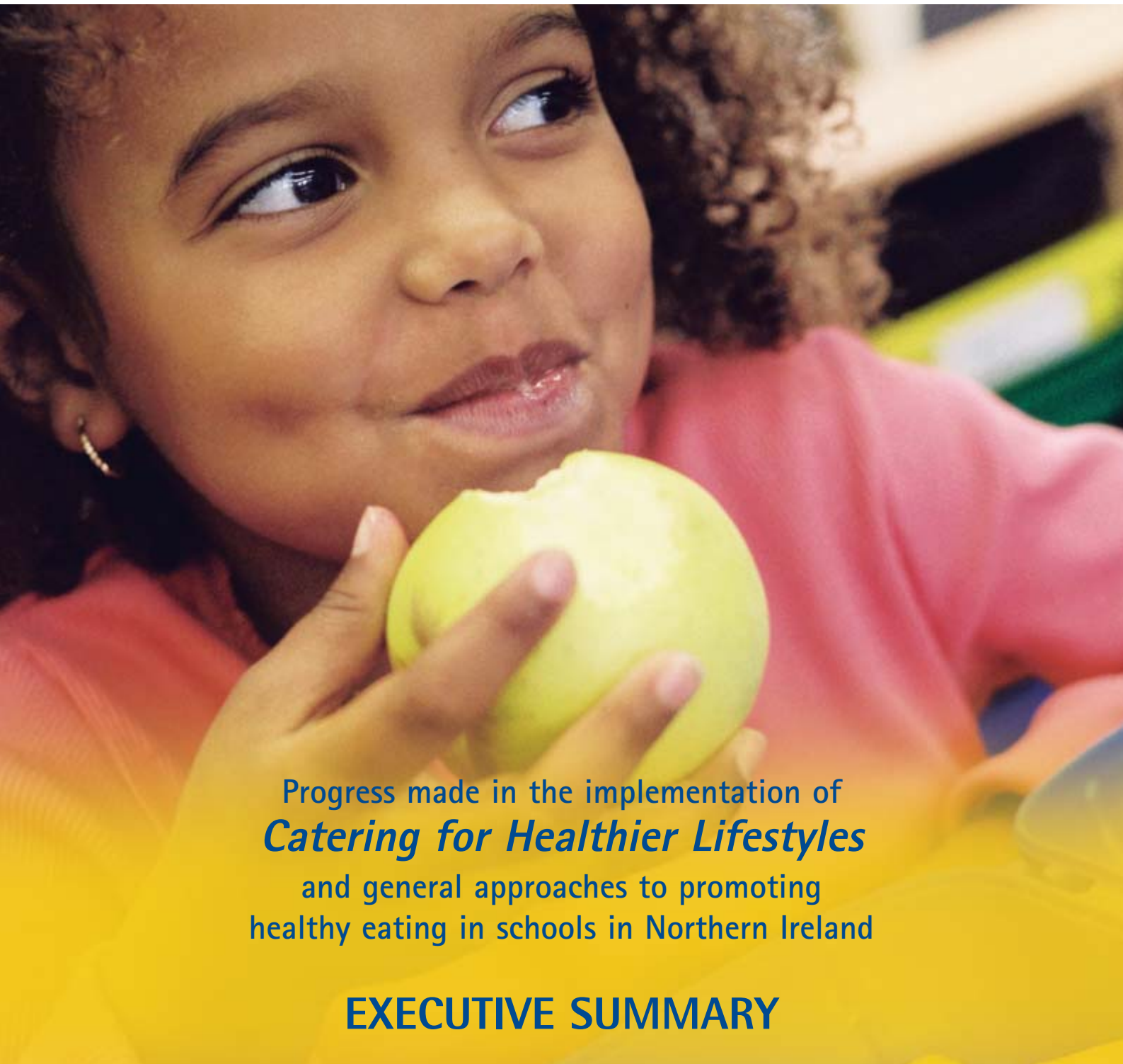




Education and Training Inspectorate

January-June 2007



Progress made in the implementation of
Catering for Healthier Lifestyles
and general approaches to promoting
healthy eating in schools in Northern Ireland

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Quantitative Terms Used

A number of quantitative terms are used throughout the report to present the findings. These terms should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	–	more than 90%
Most	–	75% - 90%
A majority	–	50% - 74%
A significant minority	–	30% - 49%
A minority	–	10% - 29%
Very few/a small number	–	less than 10%





1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Department of Education (DE) document, *Catering for Healthier Lifestyles*¹, issued in December 2001, sets out compulsory food-based nutritional standards for school meals. Between March 2004 and March 2005, approximately 100 schools took part in a pilot scheme² to assess the ease with which the standards could be introduced to schools and to identify any difficulties that may arise during their introduction or resulting from their implementation. Roll-out of the food-based nutritional standards to all schools began in the autumn term of 2005. The expectation is that all schools in Northern Ireland (NI) are now implementing these standards.
- 1.2 To support this important work further, revised nutritional standards will be introduced in September 2007. These standards will form part of DE's contribution to the cross-departmental *Investing for Health*³ and *Fit Futures*⁴ initiatives. The purpose of these initiatives is to improve the health of children in NI through nutrition and physical fitness strategies in line with the strategic goals of the *Children and Young People (CYP) Funding Package*⁵.
- 1.3 The Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) appointed two Nutritional Associates (NAs) in December 2006 to monitor and promote improvement in the implementation of the *Catering for Healthier Lifestyles* programme and the approaches schools and employing authorities are taking to the promotion of healthy eating. Since January 2007, the NAs have participated in a sample of school inspections and to date have visited 54 primary, 15 post-primary, and two special schools, across NI. During these visits discussions were held with the Principal, health education co-ordinator, catering supervisor, and with pupils. Upon completion of these inspections, the NAs provided spoken feedback to schools to help them develop further their programmes for healthy eating.

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- 1 Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2001) '*Catering for Healthier Lifestyles – Compulsory Nutritional Standards for School Meals*'
- 2 Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2005) '*Evaluation of the Pilot of the 'Catering for Healthier Lifestyles Standards' in NI*'
- 3 Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2002) '*Investing for Health*'
- 4 Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2006) '*Fit Futures: Focus on Food, Activity and Young People*'
- 5 Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2006) '*Children and Young People (CYP) Funding Package*'

- 1.4 In addition to obtaining evidence from school inspections, the NAs met with the catering managers and/or nutritional co-ordinators in each of the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs). This enabled the NAs to discuss, monitor and evaluate the strategies and practices adopted by the ELBs for implementing the recommendations of *Catering for Healthier Lifestyles*. Discussions on more general matters associated with healthy eating have also been held with officials from the Health Promotion Agency (HPA) and health promotion personnel within the ELBs.
- 1.5 This report presents the findings of the health and well-being aspect of inspection activities to date in the implementation of the *Catering for Healthier Lifestyles* programme and general approaches to promoting healthy eating in schools.



2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM HEALTH AND WELL-BEING ASPECT OF INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

2.1 It is recognised that introducing change designed to improve food in schools programmes, including school meals, is likely from the outset to be challenging, not least because it could result in food choice being restricted to more healthy options. It is encouraging therefore that a majority of schools have demonstrated that good, or very good, progress is being made in the implementation of the *Catering for Healthier Lifestyles* programme and the general approaches to promoting healthy eating. Since the introduction of the programme the ELBs and canteen staff have worked hard and have made a good start in developing menus for school meals designed to meet the food-based nutritional standards through adopting a well-organised, phased approach.

Main Findings	Action to be Taken
<p>Whilst a majority of schools are making good, or very good, progress towards achieving the food-based nutritional standards, there remain a number of important areas in menu planning where these standards are not being met.</p> <p>In the best practice, schools have adopted a well-organised, phased approach to the implementation of the standards.</p> <p>A majority of schools demonstrate good, or very good, approaches to catering for specific dietary requirements.</p> <p>A good start has been made by the ELBs in the provision of basic training for the staff involved in the preparation and service of school meals to improve nutritional understanding and practice.</p>	<p>These important menu concerns should be addressed, particularly those relating to the frequency with which fried potato products and garlic bread are provided and the extent to which menus are balanced nutritionally.</p> <p>This best practice should be disseminated more widely.</p> <p>School leadership teams and catering supervisors should ensure that no pupils are excluded from school meals for reasons of special dietary requirements.</p> <p>ELBs should continue to ensure that all catering supervisors receive updates to their nutrition training. In addition, priority should be given to providing training for catering assistants within dining centres when planning future nutrition training programmes.</p>

Main Findings	Action to be Taken
<p>The standards of the pupils' knowledge and understanding of basic nutritional concepts ranged, in a majority of instances, from good to very good.</p>	<p>School leadership teams should continue to consolidate this good practice.</p>
<p>A majority of schools had a good, or very good, range of appropriate food-related health initiatives in place. These helped to reinforce effectively key learning objectives relating to food and nutrition, and healthy lifestyles.</p>	<p>These food-related initiatives should be considered good practice, encouraged and disseminated more widely.</p>
<p>All ELBs have appointed nutritional co-ordinators to support catering supervisors in the implementation of the nutritional standards and associated issues.</p>	<p>The ELBs should work more collaboratively to ensure greater consistency and practice across their areas.</p>
<p>A significant minority of schools, whilst seeking to meet the nutritional standards for school meals at lunch times, did not apply similar principles at break time, or where breakfasts were provided.</p>	<p>Healthy choices should be provided for all food in schools to ensure that conflicting messages on healthy eating are avoided. The new nutritional standards, which will be in place from September 2007, will require greater consistency in their implementation.</p>
<p>A majority of whole-school healthy eating programmes are not monitored or evaluated effectively.</p>	<p>There is a need for a more consistent approach to the monitoring and evaluation of whole-school healthy eating programmes and policies.</p>
<p>A majority of schools do not include health and well-being practices within their School Development Plan (SDP), and therefore do not comply with the Education (School Development Plan) Regulations, 2005.</p>	<p>An assessment of the nature and quality of the arrangements for health and well-being practices within schools should be included in SDPs to comply with statutory regulations.</p>

2.2 In much of the good practice highlighted there is a need to ensure that commitments to sustaining the good policies, practices and lessons learned are encouraged, supported and widely disseminated across schools in NI.



3. FURTHER WORK

- 3.1 The NAs will begin monitoring the implementation of the new nutritional standards, effective from September 2007, and will continue to monitor and promote improvement in the general approaches schools and employing authorities are taking to promote healthy eating.







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