



Education and Training Inspectorate

September 2007-May 2009



Evaluation of the progress made in the implementation of the
food-based nutritional standards
(School Food: Top Marks)
and general approaches to promoting healthy eating
in schools in Northern Ireland



CONTENTS

Section		Page
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
2.	SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM HEALTHY EATING ASPECT OF INSPECTION ACTIVITIES	2
3.	COMPULSORY FOOD-BASED NUTRITIONAL STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL LUNCHES	5
4.	SUPPORT OF A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO HEALTHY EATING	12
5.	CONCLUSIONS	27
	APPENDIX	29

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 *School Food: Top Marks*¹ document, which issued in March 2009, is a joint venture by the Department of Education (DE), the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland² (HPA). It revises and updates the original *Catering for Healthier Lifestyles*³ programme and sets out compulsory food-based nutritional standards for school lunches. Roll-out of these revised food-based nutritional standards to all schools began in the autumn term of 2007. The expectation is that all schools in Northern Ireland (NI) are now implementing these standards.
- 1.2 These nutritional standards form part of DE's contribution to the cross-departmental *Investing for Health*⁴ and *Fit Futures*⁵ initiatives. The purpose of these initiatives is to improve the health and well-being of young people in NI through nutrition and physical fitness strategies in line with the strategic goals of the *Children and Young People (CYP) Funding Package*⁶.
- 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. This report represents the second bi-annual report based on inspection findings for the period September 2007 to May 2009.
- 1.4 Since September 2007, the NAs have participated in a sample of school inspections and to date have visited 122 primary, 37 post-primary, one alternative education provision (AEP) centre and 13 special schools, across NI. During these visits discussions were held with the Principal, health education co-ordinator, catering supervisor, head of home economics (where appropriate) and with the pupils. On completion of these inspections the leaders of the organisations received an evaluation from the NA of

1 Department of Education for Northern Ireland; Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland (2009) '*School Food: Top Marks – Nutritional Standards for School Lunches: Guide for Implementation*'

2 As from 1 April 2009 all Health Promotion Agency responsibilities have been transferred to the Public Health Agency

3 Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2001) '*Catering for Healthier Lifestyles – Compulsory Nutritional Standards for School Meals*'

4 Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2002) '*Investing for Health*'

5 Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2006) '*Fit Futures: Focus on Food, Activity and Young People*'

6 Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2006) '*Children and Young People (CYP) Funding Package*'

their current programmes for healthy eating which highlighted the main strengths of the provision and identified key areas for improvement.

- 1.5 The NAs provided detailed individual feedback on the quality of school meals in the schools visited to the relevant employing authority's catering manager. This enabled the NAs to discuss, monitor and evaluate the strategies and practices adopted by the Education and Library Boards (ELBs) for implementing the recommendations of *School Food: Top Marks*. Throughout the development of the revised nutritional standards, the NAs had regular contact with the HPA to inform consistency of interpretation of the nutritional standards for school lunches.

2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM HEALTHY EATING ASPECT OF INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

- 2.1 An earlier report⁷ identified the challenges involved in introducing change designed to improve the provision of food in schools, particularly where the change results in food choice being restricted to more, potentially less popular, healthy options. These challenges remain. It is encouraging therefore that a majority of schools have continued to demonstrate that good, or very good, progress is being made in the implementation of the food-based nutritional standards and the general approaches to promoting healthy eating. A minority are making outstanding progress. The employing authorities and canteen staff have worked very hard to develop a phased



approach to the development of a range of menus for school lunches which meet the food-based nutritional standards. From April 2008, all food provision in schools has to meet the compulsory food-based nutritional standards. Schools and the employing authorities have made a good start in applying these standards to food and drinks available other than at lunch time.

⁷ Education and Training Inspectorate (2007) *Progress Made in the Implementation of Catering for Healthier Lifestyles and General Approaches to Promoting Healthy Eating in Schools in Northern Ireland*



Main Findings	Action to be Taken
In the best practice, nutritional awareness has become well embedded in menu planning training and catering practice.	<p>The employing authorities should continue to ensure that all catering supervisors receive updates to their nutrition training and priority should continue to be given to providing training for catering assistants within dining centres.</p> <p>The staff in private catering organisations providing meals services to schools need to be trained appropriately in nutritional awareness.</p>
Whilst most schools are making outstanding, or very good, progress towards achieving aspects of the new food-based nutritional standards, there remain a number of important areas in menu planning where these standards are not being met.	<p>These important menu concerns should continue to be addressed, particularly those relating to the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🍃 high frequency and availability with which deep-fried foods or other high fat products are served; 🍃 availability of lower-fat desserts with high fat foods; 🍃 use of high fat / sugar toppings; and 🍃 competitive marketing and attractive presentation of healthier options on days when meat products are available.
A majority of schools demonstrate good, or very good, approaches to catering for specific dietary requirements.	School leadership teams should continue to review policies and procedures to ensure that all relevant staff are alerted formally to pupils' special dietary requirements.
The standards of the pupils' knowledge and understanding of basic nutritional concepts ranged, in a majority of instances, from good to very good.	School leadership teams should continue to develop this good practice through both curricular and extra-curricular provision.
A majority of schools had a good, or very good, range of appropriate food-related health initiatives in place. These helped to reinforce effectively curricular provision and health-related objectives.	These food-related initiatives should be considered good practice, encouraged and disseminated more widely.

Most schools have relevant policies in place to guide and support the development of whole-school healthy eating programmes.	<p>A draft Food in Schools Policy has been approved by the Executive for consultation in 2009-2010.</p> <p>Opportunities for the professional development of teaching staff on policy will need to be planned, monitored and evaluated to ensure best practice.</p>
A significant minority of schools offered food or drinks that did not comply with the nutritional standards for other food and drinks at breakfast clubs, tuck shops, vending machines, break time provision or after-school clubs.	<p>School leadership teams, teaching and catering staff should work together more effectively to better promote a whole-school approach to health.</p> <p>Healthy choices should be provided for <i>all</i> food in schools to ensure that pupils receive consistent messages throughout the school day.</p>
The monitoring and evaluation of the healthy eating programmes is not good enough in the majority of schools.	There is a need for consistent and effective monitoring and evaluation of whole-school healthy eating programmes and policies to ensure improvement in the quality of provision.
A majority of schools do not identify appropriately the development of health and well-being practices as a priority within their School Development Plan (SDP) and therefore do not comply with the Education (School Development Plan) Regulations, 2005.	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. The scope of this assessment should include the arrangements for healthy eating.



3. COMPULSORY FOOD-BASED NUTRITIONAL STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL LUNCHES

3.1 The provision of school lunches plays an important part in improving the health of pupils and in establishing longer-term eating habits and preferences. Fifty-one per cent of the pupils attending schools in NI take a school meal⁸. The nutritional standards aim to ensure that, irrespective of where they live in NI, parents should be confident that their children have access to a well-balanced, healthy school meal. In most aspects of its provision, the School Meals Service is making outstanding or very good progress towards meeting these standards. This has been brought about by increasing the catering staff's nutritional awareness and influencing menu planning and catering practices.

3.2 A number of important areas remain where the standards are not being met. In particular:

- 🍷 there is too much availability of deep-fried foods or other high fat products;
- 🍷 pupils have too little access to a combination of lower-fat desserts with high fat foods;
- 🍷 there is excess use of high fat / sugar toppings; and
- 🍷 there is inadequate marketing and attractive presentation of healthier options on days when meat products are available.

3.3. The employing authorities continue to adopt a range of approaches to the development of menus that are both healthy and attractive to the pupils. In one ELB area, however, greater provision needs to be made for the significant minority of catering supervisors who reported that they had limited, or no, capacity to influence menu planning in relation to pupil preferences.

3.4 Meeting the Standards 1

3.4.1 The food-based nutritional standards do not ban any particular foods but recommend that the frequency with which some are served is reduced. While some foods, such as fried foods, are only permitted to be served on a specific number of occasions in any one week, the more nutritional foods are required to be served more frequently. The findings from inspection are summarised in Table 1.

⁸ School Meals Census: October 2008

Table 1: Inspection Findings on Compliance with the New Food-Based Nutritional Standards for School Lunches

Nutritional Standards	Evidence from Inspection	Comments
<i>Rice</i> : Minimum once per week <i>Pasta</i> : Minimum once per week	A minority of schools failed to meet these minimum standards.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.
<i>Rice or Pasta (single choice menu)</i> : Minimum once per week	A minority of schools failed to meet this minimum standard.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.
<i>Bread</i> : Minimum (one serving / portion) every day	A small number of schools failed to meet this minimum standard.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.
<i>Fruit and Vegetables</i> : Minimum two every day	A minority of schools failed to meet this minimum standard.	This was particularly evident in two ELBs in 2007.
<i>Fruit</i> : Minimum one every day	A small number of schools failed to meet this minimum standard.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.
<i>Vegetables or Salad</i> : Minimum one every day	A minority of schools failed to meet this minimum standard.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.
<i>Baked Beans – as a vegetable (primary / special)</i> : Maximum once every week	A small number of primary / special schools exceeded this maximum standard.	No difference is evident between 2007 and 2008.
<i>Baked Beans – as the Only Vegetable (post-primary)</i> : Never	No post-primary school failed to meet this standard.	All post-primary schools offer a variety of vegetables with main course dishes.
<i>Drinking Milk</i> : Every day <i>Drinking (Tap) Water</i> : Free every day	A small number of schools failed to meet these minimum standards.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.



<i>Cheese as the Only Vegetarian Option:</i> Maximum twice per week	A small number of schools exceeded this maximum standard.	This represents a declining trend between 2007 and 2008.
<i>Red Meat (primary / special):</i> Minimum twice per week Maximum three times per week	A minority of primary / special schools failed to meet these standards.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.
<i>Red Meat (post-primary):</i> Minimum three times per week Maximum four times per week	A minority of post-primary schools failed to meet this minimum standard. A significant minority of post-primary schools exceeded this maximum standard.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008. This represents a declining trend between 2007 and 2008.
<i>Fish (primary / special):</i> Minimum once per week	A small number of primary / special schools failed to meet this minimum standard.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.
<i>Fish (post-primary):</i> Minimum twice per week	A small number of post-primary schools failed to meet this minimum standard.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.
<i>Oily Fish:</i> Minimum once every four weeks	A minority of schools failed to meet this minimum standard.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.
<i>Meat / Chicken Products (primary / special):</i> Maximum once per week	A minority of primary / special schools exceeded this maximum standard.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.
<i>Deep-fried Foods or Other High Fat Products⁹:</i> Maximum twice plus one oven baked fish	A significant minority of schools exceeded this maximum standard.	This represents a declining trend between 2007 and 2008.

9 Where menus state 'dry roast potatoes' this should mean potatoes cooked in a rational combination oven, or cooked using a silicone mat with **no** added fat

<i>No meat / chicken products, fried foods, or foods containing batter, breadcrumbs or pastry:</i> Minimum two days per week	A significant minority of schools failed to meet this minimum standard.	This is particularly evident in the post-primary phase in 2007 and 2008.
<i>Confectionery, chocolate and chocolate coated products:</i> Never	A minority of schools failed to meet this standard.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.
<i>Cakes, biscuits and puddings made with cocoa powder:</i> Maximum twice per week	A small number of schools exceeded this maximum standard.	No difference is evident between 2007 and 2008.
Composite fruit dishes contain at least one portion of fruit per serving	A small number of schools failed to meet this standard.	This represents a declining trend between 2007 and 2008.
Composite main course dishes contain a minimum of half a portion of vegetables per serving, in addition to a separate serving of vegetables or salad	A small number of schools failed to meet this standard.	No difference is evident between 2007 and 2008.
If beans or pulses form the protein part of a main course, another vegetable is available	No school failed to meet this standard.	All post-primary schools offer a variety of vegetables with main course dishes.
When a starchy food that is cooked in fat or oil is served, a non-fried alternative is available	A minority of schools failed to meet this standard.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.
Lower-fat desserts are available on days when fried and other high fat foods are offered	Most schools failed to meet this standard.	Menu planning should focus on awareness-raising of lower-fat desserts.



The only savoury snacks that are available are nuts and seeds with no added salt or sugar	Two schools offered savoury snacks; both of which failed to meet this standard.	Most schools do not make nuts, seeds, crisps or other savoury snacks available.
Savoury crackers or breadsticks are only served with fruit or vegetables or a dairy food	A minority of schools failed to meet this standard.	No difference is evident between 2007 and 2008.
Cakes and biscuits are only provided at lunch time and as part of a meal	A minority of schools failed to meet this standard.	This is particularly evident in the post-primary phase in 2007 and 2008.
Permissible drinks only	A minority of schools failed to meet this standard.	This was particularly evident in the post-primary phase in 2007-2008, but is improving.
Table salt is not available (primary / special schools)	A small number of primary / special schools failed to meet this standard.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.
Condiments are only provided from the service counter and are controlled by the kitchen staff	A small number of schools failed to meet this standard.	This represents an improving trend between 2007 and 2008.

3.5 Meeting the Standards 2 – Revisions to Menu Planning Guidance

3.5.1 Throughout the 2007 to 2009 reporting period, the nutritional standards were revised to give greater clarity to their meaning and implementation. Those standards which were revised included:

Meat and chicken products: A maximum of once per week for primary and special schools, while an interim standard of three, moving to two times per week, was introduced for post-primary schools. A minority of post-primary schools exceeded these maximum standards.

Healthy alternatives to meat and chicken products: A minority of schools failed to meet this standard. In 2008 an additional requirement was made to this standard specifying that such alternatives must be attractively

presented and competitively marketed. A significant minority of schools failed to meet this standard.

Salt: The requirement for salt to be removed from view in post-primary school canteens proved a difficult standard for pupils to accept. A small number failed to meet this standard.

Fruit-based dessert: A minimum of three times per week for primary and special schools. A minority failed to meet this minimum standard introduced in 2008.

Use of high fat / sugar toppings: The requirement for these to be kept to a minimum and only used if essential on desserts. A significant minority of schools failed to meet this minimum standard, introduced in 2008.

There is a need for catering supervisors to continue to embed these revised nutritional standards in their practices.

3.6 Factors Impacting on the Implementation of the School Food: Top Marks Programme

3.6.1 Catering supervisors report a number of difficulties in meeting all of the standards set out in the guidelines. The key factors which continue to be reported to the NAs include the:

- ☞ difficulties associated with encouraging pupils to eat more vegetables;
- ☞ additional time required in the preparation of foods to comply with the standards and to provide choice for the pupils;
- ☞ difficulties associated with menu planning;
- ☞ financial considerations; and
- ☞ need for additional kitchen equipment.

3.6.2 Fruit and Vegetables

Getting pupils to eat fruit and vegetables during school lunches continues to cause difficulty. Catering supervisors have worked hard to develop their culinary repertoire to find innovative means of attracting the pupils to eat such foods, including making salad bars available for the pupils to select healthy accompaniments to their main meal.





3.6.3 Menu Planning Difficulties

A significant minority of catering supervisors report that they continue to experience difficulties with menu planning, particularly in relation to the foods which will appeal to the pupils and which can be served together on the menu.

Since the appointment of the ELBs' nutritional standards co-ordinators, funded by DE, much work has been completed to support catering supervisors, who have responded positively to opportunities to share ideas and best practice between schools.

3.6.4 Financial Considerations

A significant minority of catering supervisors report that they continue to experience difficulties in meeting the requirements of the standards within budget limitations. Reasons cited include the rising cost of food prices specifically those of fruit, milk and bread, as required by the nutritional standards. The catering managers indicated that they have been unsuccessful in securing additional funding to mitigate rising food costs exacerbated by the inadequacy of resources for the preparation of fresh foods.

3.6.5 Equipment

A lack of appropriate equipment in school kitchens has resulted in ongoing difficulties in a significant minority of schools which has impacted on the ability of school canteen staff to implement the nutritional standards fully. The need for healthier cooking methods and appropriate refrigeration necessitates adequate oven and refrigerator capacity within each canteen.

3.6.6 Food Quality

A small number of catering supervisors report that the fat content of the mince beef can sometimes be higher than expected, indicating a need to further quality assure the lean quality of mince available on contract.

4. SUPPORT OF A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO HEALTHY EATING

- 4.1 A key factor in promoting healthy eating in schools is the need to ensure that, in addition to improving the quality of the food that is available in the school, the curricular provision reinforces the important knowledge and understanding which underpin the health education objectives. School leadership teams, teaching and catering staff should strive to work together more effectively to better promote a whole-school approach to health. This whole-school approach should promote consistency between what is taught in the classroom with what is available to the pupils in school canteens, breakfast clubs, tuck shops, vending machines and after-school clubs.

Case Study 1: Classroom Links with the Canteen

In a large, urban post-primary school, dishes made in home economics practical classes reflect the menu options available at lunch time in the canteen. This practice helps to familiarise the pupils with the food choices available and provides an opportunity for the sampling of new meals.

4.2 Food in Schools Policy

- 4.2.1 A draft Food in Schools Policy has been approved by the NI Executive which issued for consultation in the 2009 -10 academic year. The policy sets out the overall aims and objectives of Executive policy in relation to food in schools and describes the range of strategies and plans that are being put in place to deliver improved nutrition for pupils. Even though it is not yet statutorily required, most schools already have relevant policies to guide and support the development of healthy eating programmes. As noted in the Inspectorate's 2002 *Health Education Survey*¹⁰, learners, parents, teachers, and Boards of Governors are more likely to understand and accept the policies if they



¹⁰ Education and Training Inspectorate (2002) 'Report of a Survey of Health Education in Post-Primary Schools in Northern Ireland'



have been actively consulted at the drafting stage. These policies are most effective when they are co-ordinated and managed strategically by a member of the school leadership team with sufficient seniority.

Case Study 2: Developing a Healthy Eating Policy

Children in a small, rural primary school were responsible for writing their school's healthy eating policy. It was informed by break time surveys during which they discovered that most children were eating crisps at break time. The children, in consultation with a dietitian, teachers and parents, compiled a list of agreed (healthy) food items that may be eaten at break time.

4.2.2 In the schools visited a majority of catering supervisors worked effectively with other staff in the school. This good practice was exemplified by, for example, the active participation of catering staff in school open nights and other events attended by the parents. In other instances, the canteen staff organised open days for parents to demonstrate the choices, standards, quality and portion sizes of options that are available within the canteen. In addition, there is evidence of catering staff promoting healthy food choices through:

- 👉 attractive menus, newsletters, letters and leaflets to parents;
- 👉 healthy options highlighted on menus;
- 👉 a range of strategies to encourage the uptake of healthy food choices;
- 👉 encouraging pupils to try unfamiliar / new dishes, fruit and vegetables, for example, through taster sessions;
- 👉 attractive presentation of food, for example, salad / sandwich bars;
- 👉 appropriate displays to encourage healthy food choices; and
- 👉 incentives and promotions, competitions and theme days.

Case Study 3: Encouraging Healthier Choices in Post-Primary Schools

In a large, urban post-primary school there is an annual healthy eating competition. Points are allocated to healthy options which provide incentive for the pupils to make healthy choices at the point of sale. League tables are displayed throughout the year and prizes are awarded at intervals. Prizes have included a mountain bike and an MP3 player donated by local businesses / catering suppliers.

Case Study 4: Encouraging Healthier Choices in Primary Schools

In a small, rural primary school, parents and children sign a healthy eating contract to help them achieve their five portions of fruit and vegetables each day. A certificate is awarded if dietary changes are made.

4.3 Nutritional Standards for Other Food and Drinks in Schools

4.3.1 Interim arrangements for the nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools had been in place until April 2008 to allow schools time to adjust to the changes. In April 2008, the nutritional standards were extended to include all other food and drink provided in schools such as breakfast clubs, vending machines and tuck shops. This is to assist



schools in providing more consistent messages in this area and to support a whole-school approach to healthy eating in which school leadership teams, catering supervisors, pupils and other members of the school community have opportunity to contribute to policy and to best practice. Inspection evidence indicates that these new arrangements are timely and will support the future development of healthy eating policy in schools. The findings from inspection are summarised in Table 2.



Table 2: Inspection Findings on Compliance with the New Nutritional Standards for Other Food and Drinks in Schools¹¹

Nutritional Standards	Evidence from Inspection*	Comments
<i>Drinking water</i>	A small number of schools fail to ensure that pupils have easy access to free, fresh, preferably chilled, drinking water without having to rely on mains water supply in the toilets.	This requirement has been added to the DE guidance provided for new-build capital schemes – <i>The Building Handbook</i> .
<i>Breakfast Clubs</i>	A significant minority of the schools had a breakfast club, which offered mainly healthy breakfast provision. However, a small number of schools offer confectionery and non-compliant drinks; and a minority do not provide a range of fruit (and vegetables).	Anecdotal evidence from schools reported that attending pupils may otherwise receive no breakfast and therefore do not have a good, healthy start to their day.
<i>Vending machines</i>	No schools offer snack vending. Two schools offer non-compliant drinks.	Advice regarding alternative snacks that are appropriate to sell in vending machines should be available to schools, upon request.
<i>Tuck shops</i>	A majority of schools offer confectionery and savoury snacks (crisps); a significant minority do not offer a variety of fruit and vegetables but do offer non-compliant drinks; and one continues to offer cakes and biscuits.	This is particularly evident in the post-primary phase.







¹¹ The data in this table refer only to inspection findings arising from the 2008-2009 academic year since this is the **first** full year the nutritional standards for **other** food and drinks in schools applied

<i>Break time</i>	A small number of schools / canteens make cakes and biscuits available while not offering a variety of fruit and vegetables.	There is a range of break time provision including pre-paid break schemes in the classroom and canteen break provision.
<i>After-school clubs</i>	A significant minority of schools offer non-compliant drinks and continue to make cakes and biscuits available while not offering a variety of fruit and vegetables.	This is particularly evident in the primary phase.

- 4.3.2 The nutritional standards co-ordinators and the health education advisors within the employing authorities will have a key role in providing advice and guidance to schools. The Inspectorate will continue to monitor and evaluate the development of general approaches to healthy eating in all primary, post-primary and special school inspections.

4.4 Positive Lunch Time Experiences

- 4.4.1 An important element of the pupils' lunch time experiences is the overall quality of the environment and ethos of the canteen facilities. In the majority of schools there were many strengths in the approaches to promoting these positive lunch time experiences through, for example:

-  effective queue management;
-  sustained availability of choice throughout the lunch time service;
-  sufficient time to eat;
-  pupils who bring packed lunches being given the opportunity to eat alongside their friends who are taking school lunches;
-  provision of background music and / or television within the canteen; and
-  pleasant, well-trained, catering / supervisory staff.



Case Study 5: Positive Lunch time Experience

Children in a large, rural primary school reported to their teachers that they had to wait too long to be served. As a result, the staff changed lunch time arrangements to operate two lunch sittings, resulting in faster service.

4.5 Menu Communication with Parents

- 4.5.1 Nearly all primary schools and a significant minority of post-primary schools send menus home to parents. In each of the ELBs, the menus shared with parents should reflect, on each occasion, the choices which are to be made available to the pupils. There is evidence of schools encouraging parents to discuss available options with their children to assist them in making informed healthy food choices. In a minority of schools this is supported with information outlining the developments within the catering service in providing healthier food for pupils.

Case Study 6: Communicating with Parents

A large, urban post-primary school provides parents with a booklet outlining the catering service provided in the school. A foreword by the catering manager is given to encourage parents to share comments on how the service may be improved.

Case Study 7: Communicating with Parents

A small, rural primary school organised food tasting sessions. The teachers recorded the foods that the children liked and disliked. These *diary records* were taken home to parents who were offered the opportunity to comment. Based on these experiences, the children were more willing to try new foods.

4.6 Catering for Special Diets

- 4.6.1 Most catering supervisors and assistants are aware of pupils with specific dietary requirements. A majority of schools demonstrate good, or very good, approaches to accommodating these needs; for example, when planning menus for pupils with food intolerances and having appropriate policies in place to prohibit the use of nuts and nut-based products. Such policies and procedures should continue to be reviewed between the School Meals Service and the school to ensure that relevant staff are alerted formally to pupils' special dietary requirements.

Case Study 8: Catering for Special Diets

Care plans are developed for those experiencing peanut allergies in a large, urban post-primary school. The school doctor, the pupil, the parents and relevant staff are consulted and agree the content. Pupils are advised that the school is a peanut-free zone. Parents are advised annually of the policy. Staff, including lunch time supervisory staff, and pupils are shown a video providing information about the associated allergic reaction.

Case Study 9: Catering for Special Diets

Home economics teachers in a large, rural post-primary school compile a booklet of recipes which are sent home to the parents of pupils with a range of special dietary requirements. Comments are invited from parents regarding ingredients used and recipe adaptations.

- 4.6.2 Within a small number of primary schools in three ELBs, pupils with special diets were encouraged to take packed lunches, and were consequently excluded from school lunches. In contrast, better practice was observed relating to the provision of vegetarian options in post-primary menu planning. The practice for catering for special diets remains inconsistent and requires urgent review.



4.7 Staff Training

- 4.7.1 *School Food: Top Marks* states that catering staff have been provided with training in nutrition and translating the standards into menu planning. Nearly all ELB catering supervisors report that they have received training in nutrition; it is appropriate that this training is now also available for catering assistants. Inspection findings indicate that a majority of catering assistants had received training by 2008 - 2009. It is recommended that the employing authorities should continue to give the significant minority of schools with catering assistants still to be trained priority when planning future training programmes. Employing authorities should ensure also that where private catering organisations provide meals services for schools, the staff employed are trained appropriately in the requirements of the *School Food: Top Marks* document. In the development of good practice, school leadership teams should ensure that all catering personnel and lunch time supervisory staff should be included in child protection / safeguarding training.

4.8 Curriculum and Standards

- 4.8.1 Schools deliver health education themes across a number of subjects. Much of the health education curriculum within primary schools is taught through the curriculum areas of the World Around Us and Personal Development and Mutual Understanding. In post-primary schools, in addition to science and Personal Development (PD), much of the food and nutrition content and skills are delivered through home economics.

Case Study 10: Practical Cookery Classes

In a large, urban post-primary school, a Nourishing Nosh enrichment class is organised for Sixth Form pupils who do not opt for home economics beyond Year 10. The purpose of the class is to focus on the development of healthy, appetising and creative practical cookery skills on a budget.

- 4.8.2 The standards of the pupils' knowledge and understanding of basic nutritional concepts ranged, in a majority of instances, from good to very good. Pupils were aware of the five food groups, and were able to recount

the reasons why fruit and vegetables were important in their diet and what the recommended portions were. In addition, they had a clear understanding of the functions of nutrients, the consequences if the wrong types of food are eaten regularly, the significance of breakfast, and the need to keep hydrated.







Case Study 11: Learning about Fruit

In a large, rural primary school, pupils organise a tasting event to encourage individuals to eat more fruit and to try types not tasted before. The Year 6 children research and communicate the benefits of eating such foods, keep a food diary, and record their favourite and least favourite varieties using ICT.

4.9 Food-Related Health Initiatives

4.9.1 A majority of schools had a good, or very good, range of appropriate food-related health initiatives in place which helped to reinforce the key learning objectives taught in the classroom as illustrated in the following case studies:

-  breakfast clubs;
-  ease of access to drinking water;
-  healthy breaks; and
-  sustainable food initiative.

4.9.2 Breakfast Clubs

The Extended Schools Initiative is at the core of the Children and Young People¹² (CYP) funding package for NI. One of the aims of the package is to establish a network of Extended Schools across NI to help foster the health, well-being and social inclusion of children and young people. One of the most common services of Extended Schools includes breakfast clubs.

¹² Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2006) 'Children and Young People (CYP) Funding Package'



A significant minority of the schools inspected by the NAs had a breakfast club, which offered mainly healthy breakfast provision. It is a matter of concern that, in spite of a healthy diet being a key objective of the CYP funding package, a small number of breakfast clubs offer confectionery and non-compliant drinks and a minority do not provide a range of fruit and vegetables.

Case Study 12: Breakfast Club

In a large, urban primary school, a breakfast club offers a variety of healthy foods and allows the children through a structured programme to enjoy 20 – 30 minutes when they may, after breakfast, participate in games and in reading and primary movement sessions.

4.9.3 Ease of Access to Drinking Water

The nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools state that pupils should have easy access to free, fresh, preferably chilled, drinking water without having to rely on mains water supply in the toilets. In the schools visited, the NAs found pupils were generally allowed to drink water in the classroom. Nearly all pupils had unrestricted access to water at break times and throughout the school day; although the availability of free tap water from the canteen should be promoted more effectively. A minority of schools issue pupils with reusable water bottles and pupils are provided with opportunities to refill them when necessary. In the best practice, water bottles are sent home daily for washing and advice regarding the re-use and care of water bottles is sent home to parents via the school newsletter.

Case Study 13: Drinking Water

Children in a large, urban primary school are encouraged to have a bottle of water on their desk from which they can drink throughout the school day and refill with free access to the mains water supply. Posters are displayed around the school to encourage the children to *"Think water: stay healthy and stay hydrated."*

4.9.4 Healthy Breaks

In nearly all primary and special schools, and a minority of post-primary schools, healthy break initiatives were in place.

Case Study 14: Healthy Break Scheme

A large, urban primary school launched its healthy break initiative which included exotic and mystery fruit sampling sessions which the children had to try to identify and name. Each class learned an *Eat a Rainbow* song and used *Feely Fruit Bags* with six mystery fruits to identify by *touch, taste and smell*. The children received a platter of healthy fruits and vegetables for break time snacks.

4.9.5 Sustainable Food Initiative

The Extended Schools Initiative provides opportunities to run after-school clubs. An emerging focus on sustainability has become evident during this reporting period and is supportive of current curricular developments. Over 500 schools in NI are registered as Eco-schools, an international award programme that provides schools with a process to promote sustainability and support the curriculum through a range of topics including Healthy Living.



Case Study 15: Sustainable Food Initiative

A large, rural primary school organises a gardening club where the children can grow vegetables which are then used in the canteen, sold as soup and loose produce (onions, carrots, spinach, leeks, potatoes, celery and parsley) at the Christmas fair, or are sold and served in the local village restaurant.

Case Study 16: Sustainable Food Initiative

In a small, rural primary school, the Eco Club conducted a project called *Rubbish Investigators* and used a data collection sheet to itemise and count the rubbish in the classroom bins, before and after introducing a healthy break initiative. The children found fewer crisp bags and sweet wrappers and more fruit cores / skins as a result of the initiative.



A significant minority of schools organised a cookery club in their curricular or extra-curricular provision.

Case Study 17: Cookery Club

Children in a large, rural primary school participated in a national cooking competition where they were tasked with creating a healthy menu using local produce.

4.9.6 Packed Lunches

A significant minority of primary schools continue to implement policies to encourage the children to bring healthy packed lunches. It remains more difficult, however, to initiate such practice in post-primary schools but inspection evidence confirms that efforts are ongoing through home economics education and PD programmes, to provide advice to parents and pupils on such issues.

Case Study 18: Healthy Packed Lunches

In a small, rural primary school, each class appoints two children as health monitors to encourage healthy breaks and lunchboxes in each classroom. Duties include advising their peers on healthy snacks to include at break and lunch times.

Case Study 19: Healthy Packed Lunches

Year 9 PD topic work in a large, urban post-primary school involves working in groups with large-scale food models and the *Eat Well Plate* to design a healthy lunchbox to help pupils understand the importance of healthy food choices.





4.10 Links with External Agencies / Organisations

- 4.10.1 A majority of schools visited supplemented their curricular provision with the effective use of a wide range of external agencies and other health professionals to reinforce healthy eating messages.

Case Study 20: Links with External Agencies

An urban special school invites a major retailer's Food Advisor to host a weekly programme. The pupils learn about food, *Fair Trade* products and local suppliers. They experience well-planned food tasting sessions, participate in competitions and in a *Fruit of the Month* initiative.

4.11 Self-Evaluation Leading to Improvement

- 4.11.1 In the majority of schools visited the whole-school healthy eating programmes are not monitored or evaluated effectively. This constitutes a major area for improvement and includes the need to obtain sufficient feedback from governors, parents, teachers and, importantly, the pupils to inform the development of future practice.

Case Study 21: Consulting with Pupils

A small, rural post-primary school has established a School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG) at the request of a pupil. The group has surveyed the school community to inform food provision in the canteen. It has been instrumental in the introduction of more pasta dishes, pizza and value for money options.

Case Study 22: Monitoring Food Habits

A large, urban primary school undertook a survey to establish the children's eating habits at break time. Seventy-seven per cent were found to be eating chocolate, sweets or crisps and only eight per cent had fruit. The school adopted a healthy break policy after consulting with dental associations and dietitians. A follow-up survey indicated that 89% of children chose to have a healthy option while the popularity of the less healthy options had decreased.

4.12 Leadership and Management

- 4.12.1 The *Fit Futures* report makes far-reaching recommendations for immediate action aimed particularly at improving policy on food and the promotion of physical activity. The DE is committed to the recommendations of the report and to the objective that all schools should be healthy schools within the next ten years. In addition, the Education (School Development Plan) Regulations (2005) state that an assessment of the nature and quality of arrangements for health and well-being practices within the school should be included in the SDP. Inspection evidence confirms that a majority of schools are not addressing the arrangements concerning general approaches to promoting healthy eating sufficiently within the SDP. In the best practice, the SDP was supported by detailed health and well-being action plans which had clear targets and success criteria. It is recommended that ELB / Education and Skills Authority (ESA) advisors should consider the provision of additional professional development in the school development planning process and health-related issues for school leadership teams to ensure greater consistency in the implementation of the statutory requirements.





5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 A majority of schools are making good, or very good, progress in the implementation of the *School Food: Top Marks* programme and the general approaches to promoting healthy eating in schools. A minority are making outstanding progress. This report identifies a number of key strengths in the provision for healthy eating. In particular the:

- 👉 extent to which nutritional awareness is embedded in menu planning training and catering practice;
- 👉 outstanding, or very good, progress being made towards achieving most aspects of the new food-based nutritional standards;
- 👉 development in most schools of relevant policies to guide and support the progress of whole-school healthy eating programmes;
- 👉 good, or very good, range of appropriate food-related health initiatives in place in schools;
- 👉 standards of the pupils' knowledge and understanding of basic nutritional concepts; and
- 👉 approaches to the promotion of a positive lunch time experience for the pupils.

5.2 In addition to the strengths listed above the report also identifies a number of areas where further improvement is required. In particular the:

- 🍴 need to address prevalent concerns relating to the extent to which menus are balanced nutritionally with specific reference to the fat content of main courses and desserts;
- 🍴 need for better co-ordination of a whole-school approach to healthy eating which involves a more active involvement of all key stakeholders; and
- 🍴 need for continuing professional development for all relevant staff on Food in Schools policy issues to include how the provision can be planned, monitored and evaluated more effectively.

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

5.4 The NAs will continue to monitor and promote improvement in the general approaches schools and employing authorities are taking to promote healthy eating.





APPENDIX

SCHOOLS VISITED IN ACADEMIC YEARS 2007 / 2009

Primary Schools

Abbey Primary School, Newtownards
Ballinamallard Primary School, Enniskillen
Ballycarrickmaddy Primary School, Lisburn
Ballycraigy Primary School, Antrim
Ballymacrickett Primary School, Crumlin
Ballynahinch Primary School
Ballytober Primary School, Bushmills
Beechfield Primary School, Belfast
Belleek Primary School
Broadbridge Primary School, Londonderry
Brooklands Primary School, Belfast
Bunscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh, Belfast
Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, Castlewellan
Bunscoil Mhic Reachtain Belfast
Bushmills Primary School
Cairnshill Primary School, Belfast
Campbell College Junior School, Belfast
Carnmoney Primary School, Newtownabbey
Carrickfergus Central Primary School
Carryduff Primary School, Belfast
Cloughoge Primary School, Newry
Damhead Primary School, Coleraine
Derriaghy Primary School, Lisburn
Donaghmore Primary School, Dungannon
Dromara Primary School
Drumgor Primary School, Craigavon
Drumlegagh Primary School, Omagh

Dungannon Primary School
Edenderry Primary School, Portadown
Elmgrove Primary School, Belfast
Enniskillen Model Primary School
Fair Hill Primary School, Dromore
Fivemiletown Primary School
Florencecourt Primary School, Enniskillen
Gaelscoil na gCrann, Omagh
Glencraig Integrated Primary School, Holywood
Gorran Primary School, Coleraine
Gracehill Primary School, Ballymena
Harryville Primary School, Ballymena
Hazelbank Primary School, Ballymena
Hazelwood Primary School, Newtownabbey
Holy Child Primary School, Londonderry
Holy Rosary Primary School, Belfast
Holy Trinity Primary School, Belfast
Holy Trinity Primary School, Enniskillen
Holywood Primary School
Irish Society's Primary School, Coleraine
Iveagh Primary School, Rathfriland
Jones Memorial Primary School, Enniskillen
Lisbellaw Primary School, Enniskillen
Londonderry Model Primary School
Longstone Primary School, Ahoghill
Maghera Primary School
Mallusk Primary School, Newtownabbey
McClintock Primary School, Omagh
Millington Primary School, Portadown
Moneynick Primary School, Randalstown
Mullabuoy Primary School, Londonderry
Newcastle Primary School
Newmills Primary School, Dungannon
Newtownards Model Primary School
Newtownbreda Primary School, Belfast



Newtownbutler Primary School
Omagh Integrated Primary School
Orangefield Primary School, Belfast
Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School, Belfast
Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School, Belfast
Richmond Primary School, Dungannon
Sacred Heart Primary School, Belfast
Sacred Heart Primary School, Dungannon
Seagoe Primary School, Portadown
Sion Mills Primary School, Strabane
St Aidan's Christian Brothers' Primary School, Belfast
St Aloysius Primary School, Lisburn
St Anthony's Primary School, Larne
St Brigid's Primary School, Magherafelt
St Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor
St Canice's Primary School, Dungiven
St Colman's Primary School, Kilkeel
St Colman's Primary School, Lisburn
St Columba's Primary School, Londonderry
St Columba's Primary School, Magherafelt
St Comgall's Primary School, Bangor
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint
St James' Primary School, Newtownabbey
St John's Primary School, Coleraine
St Joseph's Primary School, Antrim
St Joseph's Primary School, Belfast
St Joseph's Primary School, Belfast
St Joseph's Primary School, Crossgar
St Joseph's Primary School, Ederney
St Joseph's Primary School, Lisburn
St Joseph's Primary School, Newry
St Joseph's Primary School, Omagh
St Macartan's Primary School, Clogher
St Malachy's Primary School, Glencull
St Mark's Primary School, Belfast

St Mary's Primary School, Bellaghy
St Mary's Primary School, Cookstown
St Mary's Primary School, Craigavon
St Mary's Primary School, Glasdrumman
St Mary's Primary School, Portglenone
St Mary's Primary School, Teemore
St Mary's Primary School, Enniskillen
St Olcan's Primary School, Armoy, Ballycastle
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Omagh
St Patrick's Primary School, Gortin, Omagh
St Patrick's Primary School, Londonderry
St Patrick's Primary School, Moneymore
St Patrick's Primary School, Newry
St Patrick's Primary School, Rasharkin
St Paul's Primary School, Irvinestown
St Teresa's Primary School, Sixmilecross
St Thérèse Primary School, Londonderry
Stewartstown Primary School
Stranmillis Primary School, Belfast
Termoncanice Primary School, Limavady
Tonagh Primary School, Lisburn
Tummery Primary School, Omagh
Vere Foster Primary School, Belfast
Whitehouse Primary School, Newtownabbey
Woods Primary School, Magherafelt

Post-Primary Schools

Ashfield Boys' High School, Belfast
Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School, Belfast
Belfast High School, Newtownabbey
Christian Brothers' School, Belfast
Coleraine High School
Collegiate Grammar School, Enniskillen
Cookstown High School
Devenish College, Enniskillen



Dunmurry High School, Belfast
Erne Integrated College, Enniskillen
Friends' School, Lisburn
Glenlola Collegiate, Bangor
Hazelwood College, Newtownabbey
Holy Trinity College, Cookstown
Lisnagarvey High School, Lisburn
Methodist College, Belfast
Portora Royal School, Enniskillen
Rathfriland High School
Slemish College, Ballymena
Sperrin Integrated College, Magherafelt
St Aidan's High School, Enniskillen
St Columba's College, Portaferry
St Columban's College, Kilkeel
St Fanchea's College, Enniskillen
St Genevieve's High School, Belfast
St Louis Grammar School, Ballymena
St MacNissi's College, Carnlough
St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint
St Mary's College, Irvinestown
St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt
St Patrick's College, Dungiven
St Patrick's High School, Lisburn
St Paul's Junior High School, Lurgan
St Paul's High School, Newry
Victoria College, Belfast
Wallace High School, Lisburn
Wellington College, Belfast

Special Schools

Arvalee School and Resource Centre, Omagh
Belmont House Special School, Londonderry
Ceara Special School, Lurgan
Clarawood Special School, Belfast

Donard Special School, Banbridge
Erne Special School, Enniskillen
Fleming Fulton Special School, Belfast
Jordanstown Special School, Newtownabbey
Longstone Special School, Belfast
Park Education Resource Centre, Belfast
Rathore School, Newry
Riverside Special School, Antrim
Sperrinview Special School, Dungannon

AEP

Lough Road Learning Centre, Lurgan





© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2010

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the ETI website: www.etini.gov.uk