



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

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 *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 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 Funding Package*⁶.
- 1.3 The Education and Training 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 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 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
<p>In the best practice, nutritional awareness has become well embedded in menu planning training and catering practice.</p>	<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>
<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>	<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.
<p>A majority of schools demonstrate good, or very good, approaches to catering for specific dietary requirements.</p>	<p>School leadership teams should continue to review policies and procedures to ensure that all relevant staff are alerted formally to pupils' special dietary requirements.</p>
<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 develop this good practice through both curricular and extra-curricular provision.</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 curricular provision and health-related objectives.</p>	<p>These food-related initiatives should be considered good practice, encouraged and disseminated more widely.</p>

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.



- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 The NAs will continue to monitor and promote improvement in the general approaches schools and employing authorities are taking to promote healthy eating.



NOTES



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