



A whole school approach to nutrition.

Prior articles have briefly touched on the important role proper diet nutrition plays in the development and wellbeing of young people, and how schools can contribute toward this. It can seem, however, either impossible to make an impact on the dietary choices pupils and their families make or inappropriate to try. There are in fact many ways schools can address this issue in a comprehensive, sustainable, and sensitive way.

As ever, these suggestions and resources are to ensure governors are able to have informed conversations with SLT and other school community members about this issue and provide credible challenge; please remain mindful of your specifically strategic role when doing so.

Why does it need addressing?

[Schools in England](#) and in [Wales](#) must meet [certain standards](#) when it comes to the food they are serving their pupils and how your school delivers on this will impact on inspections. Beyond this, proper nutrition and diet is key to healthy development of young people, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Obesity levels continue to rise among young people thanks to diets laden with sugar and saturated fats, whilst many of them fail to consume the necessary vitamins, minerals, and fibre to be healthy and active. From direct implications for physical and cognitive development through to mental health consequences due to body-related issues, the negative outcomes can be varied and serious. These habits are also highly correlated with later behaviour in adult life, so by getting it right in school we might prevent future diet-related problems too.

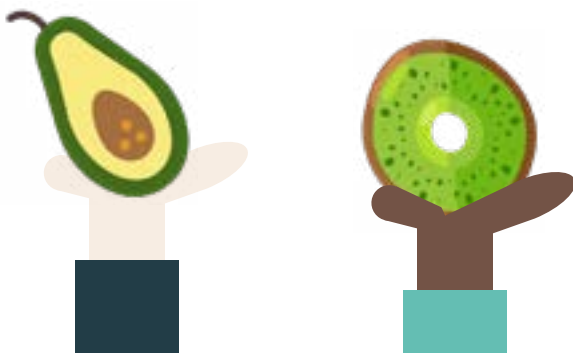
An excellent report from 2013, "[The School Food Plan](#)" lays out in great detail these and many more arguments, as well as a blueprint for improvement.

A whole school approach

Much like mental health, the physical activity and nutrition aspect of wellbeing requires a [comprehensive and mutually-reinforcing strategy](#). What is being taught in classrooms, whether in PSHE or biology, cannot be incongruent with other messaging in the school, be it overt or subtle. Ensuring the curriculum is suitable and supported by posters and information boards about healthy eating, combined with school menus that align with those messages.

Providing suitably nutritious, varied, and appetising food in school is clearly a huge factor in how pupils will develop their relationship with food and eating habits. It is incredibly difficult to make packed lunches that are nutritionally sound, and despite their best efforts parents often are unable to do so. Similarly, pupils who eat lunch in the area around school are not typically finding, or in fact looking for, highly nutritious options. High quality school meals should therefore be something parents will easily support.

There are also other advantages to getting the food provision in your school right; poor take-up of school meals not only nutritionally impacts the students but also means school canteens can become a serious cost centre. The more children eating school meals, the less the facility will need to be subsidised.



It is important to have accurate data to understand your school's current status as well as the impact of any changes. Schools can use tools like the [Healthy Schools Rating Scheme](#) and the [Active Lives Survey](#) to better understand their current provision as well as measure improvement in this regard.

Involve the pupils

Young people are more likely to eat food they themselves have grown or cooked. This provides great opportunities to improve a school's extra-curricular provision, relationship with the community, and pupils' understanding and appreciation for food. [Gardening and cooking clubs](#) are a perfect way to introduce pupils to life-long skills and habits, de-mystify food, and get them excited about healthier living. This can also be an easy way to engage with parents, as well as lean on their support and expertise, and can be used to run cookery competitions or even create school recipe books. Older pupils might even appreciate the opportunity to explore this as a potential career. [Food – A Fact of Life](#) is a fantastic programme run by the British Nutrition Foundation aimed at supporting schools in this regard.

Many schools in England and Wales offer [breakfast clubs](#), which can be a fantastic way to ensure all pupils have the opportunity to start the day with a nutritious meal. It is worth exploring if your school requires one or, if one already exists, that it is [suitably supported and funded](#).

Our thanks to the [British Nutrition Foundation](#) and the [Children's Health and Exercise Research Centre \(CHERC\)](#) of the University of Exeter, for their contributions to this article.

Speak to Parents

As alluded to earlier, it is crucial that schools are communicating with parents regarding nutrition; that they are provided with accurate and helpful information, both as to what is being done in school but also how they can best be supporting their children's eating habits and diet at home. How this is best achieved will vary between different parents at different schools, but their support is critical to ensure healthy habits are nurtured and encouraged outside of school.

