

PACKED LUNCH GUIDANCE

The current nutritional guidelines laid down by Government apply to food provided by the school catering service. There are no plans to introduce standards for packed lunches that are brought from home. However, if you are aiming to transform food culture right across your school you will want to tackle this issue.

Lunchboxes can be unhealthy for a variety of reasons...

- Lack of information about what a healthy lunch consists of.
- Concern that child will only eat certain foods.
- Perception that healthy food is expensive.
- Desire to be different.

Any attempt to address the quality of packed lunches needs to be conducted in a sympathetic and co-operative manner that avoids blame/shame and addresses the barriers outlined above.

Consider your timing. It will probably be better to tackle this issue once you have made some changes to school dinners and generally raised the profile of healthy eating in your school. Conduct an audit of lunchbox contents before you start your planned activities (see suggested links). This process will give you a baseline – from which you can see if any changes occur as a result of your activities.

By this time pupils themselves may be ready to make presentations to parents at school events about the need for change. Otherwise consider holding an open meeting to discuss the issue and the best way forward. Inviting a local health professional, such as your healthy schools co-ordinator or food in school co-ordinator to come along to present the case for healthier packed lunches can help to diffuse tension and demonstrate the change is part of a national agenda.

Assuming the majority are in favour of supporting change, draft a policy statement and, once it has been accepted, set the implementation date for the beginning of the next term (or term after if you are at near the end of one.) Example policies can be found at www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk, but you may wish to incorporate sustainability objectives too, such as the 'Reduce, Re-use, Recycle' motto on packaging waste or tips about when British apples and other fruits are in season.

Use this interim time to prepare everyone for the change. Distribute leaflets, which could be bought in or designed by pupils, about healthy lunchboxes. Set up lunchbox displays, hold assemblies and offer food tasting or sandwich-making demonstrations/workshops for pupils, parents and carers.

Re-assure everyone that you will simply trial the idea for half a term and then review how well it has gone.

If your pupils have been a driving force behind the initiative they will be your best monitors. Otherwise ensure that the task of checking packed lunches is given to a member of staff, this could be teaching staff, catering staff or midday meal supervisors.

You may choose to reward healthy packed lunches with stickers / congratulatory letters home / etc.

In the event that a parent or pupil does not adhere to the policy, a polite reminder leaflet can simply be placed in the lunch box. If a child regularly brings a packed lunch that does not conform to the policy then you may wish to contact the parents to discuss the situation.

Once your new approach is in place make sure that it is well publicised, particularly to new pupils, parents and carers. Make it available on your school's website and incorporate it into the school prospectus.

Use opportunities such as parents evenings and Healthy Living weeks to promote the policy as part of a whole school approach to healthier eating.

Links:

- School Food Trust (FAQ + myth busters) – provides sample letters for parents and packed lunch policy template www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk
- Food in Schools – tool kit provides packed lunch audit and guidance www.foodinschools.datacentre.uk.net
- Food Standards Agency – provide healthy packed lunch menus and tips www.eatwell.gov.uk/agesandstages/children/lunchboxsect
- Sustain – case study for improving packed lunches www.sustainweb.org/g5ap/idea3.php
- What's in season http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/in_season

