

BEST PRACTICE

Latchmere School

Latchmere School has always recognised the importance of a hot school meal. Since the school was opened in 1937, hot lunch has been a part of school life, with between 40-50% uptake.

In 2005 the school decided to improve upon its existing arrangement with Scolarest and explore the option of an in-house caterer. Keen to make a fresh start, the school offered redundancy to the Scolarest kitchen staff and advertised for an in-house school cook.

The school has a large kitchen and happily the framework was sound so no extensive building work was required to bring the facility up to the standard required for the preparation of fresh food. A refit was necessary but the school was able to re-use equipment from an old people's home that had recently closed.



Funding

The kitchen building also houses the dining room and a community centre, so funding for the upgrade was available through Every Child Matters and was supplemented by the school's PTA.

Monitoring and Development

Latchmere is keen to give the children a say when it comes to school food so the school cook meets with the school council each term to discuss the menu and the eating environment. It was the school council that lobbied for cheese and biscuits to be added as a pudding option.

"Helen, our cook, asks us what we like best for lunch – I love curry and rice!"

At Latchmere, all the children eat together, whether they are enjoying a hot school meal or eating a packed lunch. Teachers can regularly be found eating a hot lunch with the children and this acts as an effective monitoring system.

Sustainability

Latchmere parents pay £2.00 for each school meal and with the sharp rise in take-up since going in-house, this income more than covers the wages of the cook, plus an assistant, as well as the kitchen maintenance and food costs.

Sourcing

By self-managing their meal provision, Latchmere is not restricted by nominated suppliers and welcomes the idea of sourcing direct from a local farm.

Cooking and Growing

Latchmere has extended its commitment to the whole-school approach to food with cooking and growing clubs. It benefits from a fully productive allotment within the school grounds harvesting strawberries, raspberries, rhubarb, grapes, potatoes, onions, beans, cabbages, pumpkins and herbs. The school cook is able to use a lot of this produce in the kitchen and anything left over goes home with the children. The allotment is managed by parents and staff and is open to all children as a lunchtime or after school club. The gardening club is free, funded by other club fees. The allotment space was set up by the Prince's Trust Young Offenders programme, co-ordinated by Kingston Police.

In 2005, Latchmere introduced a flapjack scheme. Once a week, children from classes in KS2 take turns to make a healthy flapjack for the whole school. Every day at 10am, each child is offered a small square, giving them a little energy burst to get them through the morning. The recipe came from the British Diabetic Association who carefully checked the sugar content. The scheme is fully funded out of PTA funds and is independent of public funding.

Outcomes and Benefits

Latchmere was able to be a valuable source of information for a neighbouring school when it decided to pursue an in-house provision. St Paul's CE Junior made several visits to Latchmere to see its meal service in action and was able to use Latchmere as a working model when planning for its new provision.

Finally a word from the Head Mrs Al Jawad:

"Healthy and nutritious food and drink ensures that children are healthy, ready to learn with the ability to concentrate throughout the day."

