

BEST PRACTICE

Tiffin Girls' School



When Gardener Merchant (now Sodexo) resigned their contract in 2001, Tiffin Girls' School decided to go it alone. The school was only given one month's notice so with up to 900 girls to feed, it was a case of all hands on deck. Whilst it was researching catering possibilities, the school brought in pre-prepared sandwiches as an interim measure – with the finance department on canteen duty each day taking the money!

Tiffin now has a full-time catering manager and assistant, plus three part-time assistants to produce freshly prepared food available to the girls at morning break and lunchtime. The meals are made from scratch and include two hot main meals, a choice of two pasta dishes, baked potatoes, home made soup, salad bar and sandwiches.

In order to offer the service the school had to make changes to its kitchen, but fortunately this only involved a re-fit of equipment and a modification of the space available. It now has a streamlined kitchen, a separate serving area, including a self-service salad and sandwich bar and large dining area that can seat those having school lunch and the few that prefer a packed lunch from home.

In order to make the lunchtime run more efficiently, a cashless system was introduced in 2002. Each girl has a lunch card, which gets topped up by parents via the finance office, or by the girls themselves at a machine in the dining hall. Soon the school will trial an online top up system. The cashless system minimises queuing and has the added advantage of making no distinction between those paying and those on free school meals. Everyone has the same card: teachers, visitors and all the girls. No system is without its problems and Tiffin has found that the biggest drawback is girls losing their cards. A very pragmatic finance department introduced a clever penalty system whereby girls have to pay £1 to the school charity for every replacement card, resulting in an initial boost to the charity followed by a marked reduction in lost cards!

Monitoring and Development

Most of the teachers eat lunch in the dining hall with the girls and this doubles as a very efficient monitoring system. The school has monthly meetings with the kitchen staff to discuss any problems and the school council presents the views of the girls. They recently requested healthier sandwiches and more food at morning break. The school council also looked at environmental impact and have replaced paper plates and plastic knives and forks with melamine plates and cutlery. The school were happy to absorb the resultant cost of a dishwasher.

Sustainability

The average lunchtime spend in the Tiffin canteen is £2.00. With anything from 500-800 serves per day, the school is able to cover their costs, with any small profit going back into the kitchen. At present the income from the canteen during the busy months covers the periods of study leave, when numbers drop significantly.

Cooking and Growing

Tiffin currently has no cooking available at school, but interestingly, when asked recently what they'd like to add to the curriculum, 80% said cooking.

Outcomes and Benefits

The school has a successful in-house provision with a high take-up.

Tiffin's head girl summed things up:

“Our school lunches are very popular. There's lots of variety and very few girls opt for packed lunches”