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Education and Training Inspectorate

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Progress made in the implementation of
Catering for Healthier Lifestyles
and general approaches to promoting
healthy eating in schools in Northern Ireland

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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 Department of Education (DE) document, *Catering for Healthier Lifestyles*¹, issued in December 2001, sets out compulsory food-based nutritional standards for school meals. Between March 2004 and March 2005, approximately 100 schools took part in a pilot scheme² to assess the ease with which the standards could be introduced to schools and to identify any difficulties that may arise during their introduction or resulting from their implementation. Roll-out of the food-based nutritional standards to all schools began in the autumn term of 2005. The expectation is that all schools in Northern Ireland (NI) are now implementing these standards.
- 1.2 To support this important work further, revised nutritional standards will be introduced in September 2007. These standards will form part of DE's contribution to the cross-departmental *Investing for Health*³ and *Fit Futures*⁴ initiatives. The purpose of these initiatives is to improve the health of children in NI through nutrition and physical fitness strategies in line with the strategic goals of the *Children and Young People (CYP) Funding Package*⁵.
- 1.3 The Education and Training Inspectorate (the 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. Since January 2007, the NAs have participated in a sample of school inspections and to date have visited 54 primary, 15 post-primary, and two special schools, across NI. During these visits discussions were held with the Principal, health education co-ordinator, catering supervisor, and with pupils. Upon completion of these inspections, the NAs provided spoken feedback to schools to help them develop further their programmes for healthy eating.

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- 1 Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2001) '*Catering for Healthier Lifestyles – Compulsory Nutritional Standards for School Meals*'
- 2 Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2005) '*Evaluation of the Pilot of the 'Catering for Healthier Lifestyles Standards' in NI*'
- 3 Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2002) '*Investing for Health*'
- 4 Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2006) '*Fit Futures: Focus on Food, Activity and Young People*'
- 5 Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2006) '*Children and Young People (CYP) Funding Package*'

1.4 In addition to obtaining evidence from school inspections, the NAs met with the catering managers and/or nutritional co-ordinators in each of the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs). This enabled the NAs to discuss, monitor and evaluate the strategies and practices adopted by the ELBs for implementing the recommendations of *Catering for Healthier Lifestyles*. Discussions on more general matters associated with healthy eating have also been held with officials from the Health Promotion Agency (HPA) and health promotion personnel within the ELBs.

2. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS FROM HEALTH AND WELL-BEING ASPECT OF INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

2.1 It is recognised that introducing change designed to improve food in schools programmes, including school meals, is likely from the outset to be challenging, not least because it could result in food choice being restricted to more healthy options. It is encouraging therefore that a majority of schools have demonstrated that good, or very good, progress is being made in the implementation of the *Catering for Healthier Lifestyles* programme and the general approaches to promoting healthy eating. Since the introduction of the programme the ELBs and canteen staff have worked hard and have made a good start in developing menus for school meals designed to meet the food-based nutritional standards through adopting a well-organised, phased approach.

Main Findings	Action to be Taken
Whilst a majority of schools are making good, or very good, progress towards achieving the food-based nutritional standards, there remain a number of important areas in menu planning where these standards are not being met.	These important menu concerns should be addressed, particularly those relating to the frequency with which fried potato products and garlic bread are provided and the extent to which menus are balanced nutritionally.
In the best practice, schools have adopted a well-organised, phased approach to the implementation of the standards.	This best practice should be disseminated more widely.
A majority of schools demonstrate good, or very good, approaches to catering for specific dietary requirements.	School leadership teams and catering supervisors should ensure that no pupils are excluded from school meals for reasons of special dietary requirements.

Main Findings	Action to be Taken
<p>A good start has been made by the ELBs in the provision of basic training for the staff involved in the preparation and service of school meals to improve nutritional understanding and practice.</p>	<p>ELBs should continue to ensure that all catering supervisors receive updates to their nutrition training. In addition, priority should be given to providing training for catering assistants within dining centres when planning future nutrition training programmes.</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 consolidate this good practice.</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 key learning objectives relating to food and nutrition, and healthy lifestyles.</p>	<p>These food-related initiatives should be considered good practice, encouraged and disseminated more widely.</p>
<p>All ELBs have appointed nutritional co-ordinators to support catering supervisors in the implementation of the nutritional standards and associated issues.</p>	<p>The ELBs should work more collaboratively to ensure greater consistency and practice across their areas.</p>
<p>A significant minority of schools, whilst seeking to meet the nutritional standards for school meals at lunch times, did not apply similar principles at break time, or where breakfasts were provided.</p>	<p>Healthy choices should be provided for all food in schools to ensure that conflicting messages on healthy eating are avoided. The new nutritional standards, which will be in place from September 2007, will require greater consistency in their implementation.</p>
<p>A majority of whole-school healthy eating programmes are not monitored or evaluated effectively.</p>	<p>There is a need for a more consistent approach to the monitoring and evaluation of whole-school healthy eating programmes and policies.</p>
<p>A majority of schools do not include health and well-being practices within their School Development Plan (SDP), and therefore do not comply with the Education (School Development Plan) Regulations, 2005.</p>	<p>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.</p>

3. COMPULSORY FOOD-BASED NUTRITIONAL STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL MEALS

3.1 The provision of school meals plays an important part in improving the health of pupils and in establishing longer-term eating habits and preferences. The nutritional standards aim to ensure that, irrespective of where they live in NI, the parents of the 51% of pupils who take school meals will know that their children have access to a well-balanced, healthy school meal. A majority of schools in NI are making good or very good progress towards meeting these standards. There are, however, a number of important areas where the standards are not being met. For example, there are concerns relating to the frequency of the availability of fried potato products and garlic bread, and the extent to which menus are balanced nutritionally.

3.2 The ELBs and schools have worked hard to develop menus that aim to meet the nutritional standards. A majority of schools began this process within the past year building on the work undertaken in the pilot. In the best practice, schools have adopted a well-organised, phased approach to the implementation of the standards. This gradual approach has helped to ensure that the pupils are accustomed to the changes and therefore accept the new menus much more readily.

3.3 A range of approaches was adopted by the ELBs in the development of menus that would be both healthy and attractive to the pupils. Most catering supervisors devised their own menus, nearly all of which were checked by the nutritional co-ordinator and/or ELB and were informed by menu planning guidance materials. In contrast, a minority of schools were provided with template menus from their ELB which were rotated on a fixed cycle. However, in one ELB, a majority of catering supervisors report that they had limited, or no, scope to influence the menus in their kitchen. In addition, in a minority of instances, across all ELBs, there was evidence that the catering supervisors, on their own initiative, made decisions to deviate from the ELB template menu. This presented difficulties with regard to communicating these changes to the pupils and their parents.

3.4 Meeting the Standards 1: Frequency

3.4.1 The food-based standards do not ban any particular foods but recommend that the frequency with which some are served is reduced. While some

foods, such as fried foods, are only permitted to be served on a specific number of occasions in any one week, the more nutritional foods are required to be served more frequently. The findings from inspection are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Inspection Findings on the Frequency of Foods Being Served to Pupils

Frequency Standards	Evidence from Inspection	Comments
<i>Chips, roast* and other fried potato products, and garlic bread: maximum of twice per week.</i>	A minority of schools exceed the maximum standard.	This is particularly evident in a majority of schools in one ELB.
<i>Rice: minimum of once per week.</i> <i>Pasta: minimum of once per week.</i>	A significant minority of schools fail to meet these minimum standards.	In the case of pasta, this is particularly evident in a majority of schools in one ELB.
<i>Baked beans as a vegetable (primary/special): maximum of once per week.</i> <i>Alternative vegetable available throughout the lunch service when baked beans are served (post-primary/special).</i>	A small number of primary/special schools exceed the maximum standard. No post-primary/special school has baked beans as the only vegetable available on the menu.	
<i>Fish: minimum of once per week.</i>	A minority of schools fail to meet the minimum standard.	

* Many schools offer roast potatoes on their menus. One method of cooking is by deep-fat frying. In other instances, roast potatoes are cooked by 'dry-frying' which has the potential to be a healthier method of cooking. There are, however, inconsistencies in the level of understanding of the principles of 'dry-frying' as a healthier alternative to deep-fat frying. There is a need for further training in this area.

Frequency Standards	Evidence from Inspection	Comments
<i>Red meat (primary/special/post-primary):</i> minimum standard of twice per week.	A minority of primary schools fail to meet the minimum standard. No post-primary/special school failed to meet this standard.	
<i>Red meat (primary/special):</i> maximum standard of three times per week.	A significant minority of primary schools exceed the maximum standard.	This is particularly evident in a majority of primary schools in one ELB.
<i>Drinking milk:</i> available every day.	A small number of schools fail to meet this standard.	
<i>Drinking water:</i> available every day.	All schools meet this standard.	
<i>Fresh fruit, fruit juice, fruit tinned in fruit juice, or fruit salad available every day, throughout the lunch service (post-primary/special).</i>	All post-primary/special schools meet this standard.	Although this is not a standard for primary schools, nearly all schools made fresh fruit available every day.
<i>At least half of all desserts on offer are fruit and/or milk-based.</i>	A small number of schools fail to meet this standard.	

3.5 Meeting the Standards 2: Menu Planning

3.5.1 In addition to the guidelines on the frequency which specific foods can be served, *Catering for Healthier Lifestyles* also outlines detailed standards for menu planning and recommends what foods can, and cannot, be served together. The findings from inspection are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Inspection Findings on Menu Planning

Frequency Standards	Evidence from Inspection	Comments
<i>Chips, roast potatoes, other fried potatoes, and garlic bread served with non-fried alternative.</i>	A minority of schools fail to meet this standard.	
<i>Chips, roast potatoes, other fried potatoes, or garlic bread are not served with a main course cooked in batter or pastry.</i>	A majority of schools fail to meet this standard.	Better practice is exemplified in one ELB where more appropriate non-fried accompaniments are made available to pupils.
<i>Low-fat desserts are always available when chips, roast potatoes, other fried potatoes, or garlic bread are offered.</i>	Most schools fail to meet this standard.	Further clarification is required on what constitutes a low-fat dessert.
<i>Main course containing pastry is not served at the same meal as a dessert that contains pastry.</i>	Nearly all schools meet this standard.	

3.6 **Factors Impacting on the Implementation of the *Catering for Healthier Lifestyles Programme***

3.6.1 Catering supervisors report a number of difficulties in meeting the standards set out in the guidelines. The key factors reported to the NAs were the:

- 🔥 difficulties associated with encouraging pupils to eat more vegetables and the additional time required in the preparation of these foods by the catering staff;
- 🔥 difficulties associated with menu planning;

- 🍷 financial considerations; and
- 🍷 need for additional kitchen equipment.

3.6.2 **Fruit and Vegetables**

A majority of catering supervisors report difficulty in getting pupils to eat vegetables. Accordingly, a majority 'disguise' vegetables by puréeing or blending them into foods or dishes such as sauces, pizza toppings, curries and soup. Similarly, catering staff have used creative ways of incorporating fruit into puddings through liquidising them into muffins and sponges and including, for example, mandarin orange segments into rice and pasta salads. However, a significant minority of catering supervisors report that these techniques require additional preparation time.

3.6.3 **Menu Planning Difficulties**

A minority of catering supervisors report that they have experienced difficulties with menu planning, particularly in relation to the foods that can be served together on the menu in order to meet the standards. They also report difficulties in offering a variety of dishes that meet the standards and which will appeal to the pupils. There is some uncertainty amongst catering supervisors as to what foods are allowed and not allowed by the standards. There is a need for greater consistency in the support and guidance provided to catering supervisors by the ELBs on specific aspects of menu planning.

3.6.4 **Financial Considerations**

A small number of catering supervisors state that they have experienced difficulties in meeting the requirements of the standards within budget limitations. A particular area of concern is the relatively high cost of providing pupils with a range of fresh fruit. The catering supervisors also report that this problem is exacerbated by the fact that the additional working hours required to prepare this fresh food are not resourced adequately.

3.6.5 **Equipment**

Lack of appropriate equipment in school kitchens has resulted in difficulties in a small number of instances. The most notable small items of kitchen equipment that were in short supply included vegetable graters, food processors, and hand blenders.

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3.6.6 **Food Quality**

A minority of catering supervisors report that the overall quality of processed food has been improved as a result of the nutritional standards. For example, chicken bites are now reported to contain chicken breast meat rather than mechanically reformed meat.

4. SUPPORT OF A WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH TO HEALTHY EATING

4.1 A key factor in promoting healthy eating in schools is the need to ensure that, in addition to improving the quality of the food that is available in the school, the curricular provision reinforces the important knowledge and understanding which underpin the health education objectives. This whole-school approach should promote consistency between what is taught in the classroom with what is available to the pupils in school canteens, breakfast clubs, tuck shops, vending machines and after-school clubs. A majority of schools have relevant policies to guide and support the development of healthy eating programmes. These are most effective when they are co-ordinated and managed strategically by an appropriate member of the school leadership team.

4.2 In the schools visited a significant minority of catering supervisors worked effectively with other staff in the school. This good practice was exemplified by, for example, the active participation by catering staff in school open nights and other events attended by the parents. In other instances, the canteen staff organised open days for parents to demonstrate the choices, standards, quality and portion sizes of options that are available within the

canteen. In addition, there is evidence of catering staff promoting healthy food choices through:

- attractive menus, newsletters, letters, and leaflets to parents;
- healthy options highlighted on menus;
- encouraging pupils to try unfamiliar/new dishes, fruit and vegetables, for example, through taster sessions;
- attractive presentation of food, for example, salad/sandwich bar;
- consulting the pupils on their preferences, for example, through a student council;
- appropriate displays to encourage healthy food choices and physical activity; and
- incentives and promotions, and competitions and theme days.

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4.3 However, the NA visits identified a number of inconsistencies in the extent to which a whole-school approach to healthy eating was implemented. A significant minority of schools, whilst seeking to meet the nutritional standards for school meals at lunch times, had conflicting provision at break time and breakfast where this was available. Although the new standards did not apply to food provision in schools other than lunch at the time of the visits, conflicting messages should be avoided, where possible. It is recommended, therefore, that all food provision in schools should support a whole-school approach to healthy eating. In addition, there is a need for stronger links between the catering supervisors and school leadership teams to ensure that the pupils receive consistent messages throughout the school day.

4.4 The survey of health education in post-primary schools in NI conducted by the Inspectorate in 2002⁶ identified the need for the provision of more healthy choices in their vending machines. It is encouraging that the

6 Education and Training Inspectorate (2002) 'Report of a Survey of Health Education in Post-Primary Schools in Northern Ireland'

majority of schools visited by NAs have replaced the drinks and snacks available in their vending provision with healthier options. It is important that this good practice should be disseminated.

4.5 A majority of primary schools that have tuck shops in place ensure that healthier snack products are available. Only a minority of post-primary schools, however, are selling healthier drinks and snacks in their tuck shops and canteens. Schools, particularly in the post-primary phase, should review the range of food items provided through their tuck shops to ensure that provision is consistent with messages being taught in the classroom.

4.6 The nutritional co-ordinators and the health education advisors within the ELBs have a key role in providing advice and guidance to the schools in their area and to support the schools in the development of a whole-school approach to healthy eating, including nutrition training and menu planning. From September 2007 the new nutritional standards , will seek to ensure that schools comply with the extension of the nutritional strategy for school meals to all sources of food in schools, including breakfast clubs, vending machines and tuck shops to assist schools in providing more consistent messages in this area. Interim arrangements involving some aspects of these standards, such as oily fish, meat products, and break provision, will not be in place until April 2008 to allow schools and catering supervisors time to adjust to the changes.

4.7 **Positive Lunch Time Experiences**

4.7.1 An important element of the pupils' lunch time experiences is the overall quality of the environment and ethos of the dining facilities. In the majority of schools there were many strengths in the approaches to promoting these positive lunch time experiences through, for example:

- effective queue management;
- sustained availability of choice throughout the lunch time service;
- sufficient time to eat;
- pupils who bring packed lunches being given the opportunity to eat alongside their friends who are taking school meals;

- provision of background music and/or television within the canteen; and
- pleasant, well-trained, catering/supervisory staff.

Case Study 1: Positive Lunch time Experience

In a small rural primary school, the school leadership team removed school meal tickets to reduce any differentiation associated with receipt of free school meals.

Case Study 2: Positive Lunch time Experience

In a large urban post-primary school, the canteen staff organised lunches around different themes, which were then reinforced throughout the school. The canteen staff dressed up and appropriate music was played.

4.8 Menu Communication with Parents

- 4.8.1 Nearly all primary schools and a significant minority of post-primary schools send menus home to parents. There is evidence of schools encouraging parents to discuss available options with their children to assist them in making informed healthy food choices. In a significant minority of ELBs this is supported with information outlining the developments within the catering service in providing healthier food for pupils.

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Case Study 3: Menu Communication with Parents

In a small urban primary school, parents were given the opportunity to complete a feedback form attached to the letter accompanying their copy of the menu for school meals. Parents have completed the feedback form to provide constructive criticism as well as to congratulate the school on the significant improvements made to date with regard to school meals.

4.9 Catering for Special Diets

4.9.1 Nearly all catering supervisors and assistants are aware of pupils with specific dietary requirements. A majority of schools demonstrate good, or very good, approaches to meeting these needs, for example, when planning menus for pupils with food intolerances. Other strengths include:

- appropriate policies in place to prohibit nuts and nut-based products;
- ensuring that the special dietary requirements for individual pupils are met, for example, gluten-free meals where required; and
- the provision of special diets as appropriate, for example, to comply with religious beliefs or for vegetarians.

4.9.2 Within a small number of schools, however, pupils with a special diet or food intolerance had limited choice or were encouraged to take packed lunches, and were consequently excluded from school meals. This practice is inappropriate. In addition, the good practice observed relating to the provision of vegetarian options on menus should be more widespread, particularly in post-primary schools.

4.10 Staff Training

4.10.1 *Catering for Healthier Lifestyles* recognises that catering staff will require training on how to implement the standards. All ELB catering supervisors report that they have received nutrition training to improve basic nutritional understanding and practice. It is appropriate that this training will also be provided for all catering assistants. Most of the dining centres the NAs visited had catering assistants who had not received any training in nutrition; it is recommended that the ELBs should give these schools priority when planning future training programmes. It is also recommended that employing authorities should ensure that where external franchised catering

organisations provide meals services for schools, the staff employed by these organisations are also trained appropriately in the requirements set out in the document.

- 4.10.2 All ELBs have appointed nutritional co-ordinators, funded by DE, to support catering supervisors in the implementation of the nutritional standards, menu planning, portion sizes, recipe ideas, and preparation techniques. These nutritional co-ordinators organise meetings and training within their ELB area. In order to disseminate the good practice identified in this report it is recommended that the ELBs should work more collaboratively to ensure greater consistency in practice.

4.11 **Curriculum and Standards**

- 4.11.1 A majority of schools visited delivered health education themes across a number of subjects. Much of the health education curriculum within primary schools is taught through the curriculum areas of the World Around Us and Personal Development. In post-primary schools, in addition to science and personal, social and health education (PSHE), much of the food and nutrition content and skills are delivered through home economics.

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Case Study 4: Curriculum and Standards

In a large urban post-primary school, within a PSHE lesson, pupils participated in a Brain Friendly Learning initiative where they were taught why food is important for learning.

Case Study 5: Curriculum and Standards

Year 8 pupils in a home economics class in a rural post-primary school were provided with opportunities to develop nutritional knowledge and practical cooking skills which showed progression through the key stage. Recipes chosen engaged the pupils and stimulated their interest in healthy food and eating. Pupils took responsibility for planning their own work and managing their time rather than always following a teacher-directed routine.

- 4.11.2 The standards of the pupils' knowledge and understanding of basic nutritional concepts ranged, in a majority of instances, from good to very good. Pupils were aware of the five food groups, and were able to recount the reasons why fruit and vegetables were important in their diet and what the recommended portions were. In addition, they had a clear understanding of the functions of nutrients, the consequences if the wrong types of food are eaten regularly, the significance of breakfast, and the need to keep hydrated.

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4.12 **Food-Related Health Initiatives**

- 4.12.1 A majority of schools had a good, or very good, range of appropriate food-related health initiatives in place which helped to reinforce the key learning objectives taught in the classroom as illustrated in the following case studies:

- healthy breaks;
- breakfast clubs;
- after-school clubs; and
- ease of access to drinking water.

4.12.2 **Healthy Breaks**

In nearly all primary schools, and a minority of post-primary schools, healthy break initiatives were in place.

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Case Study 6: Healthy Break

In a large urban primary school, the school leadership team implemented the Big Lottery funded *Healthy Breaks* scheme. The scheme enabled the school canteen to provide parents with the option of pre-paid healthy breaks for years 1 to 3, and encouraged healthy break time provision by parents for all other children. In addition, a *Healthy Breaks* reward chart was used to encourage healthy breaks. A *Food for Thought* guide to *Healthy Breaks* was also provided to parents and was available in several languages spoken within the school.

4.12.3 **Breakfast Clubs**

The Extended Schools initiative is at the core of the CYP funding package for NI. One of the aims of the package is to establish a network of Extended Schools across NI to help foster the health, well-being and social inclusion of children and young people. One of the most common services of Extended Schools includes breakfast clubs. A minority of the schools inspected by the NAs had a breakfast club, which offered mainly healthy breakfast provision.

Case Study 7: Breakfast Club

In a small urban primary school, children, some of whom may not otherwise receive a breakfast, had the opportunity to attend a breakfast club. In addition, a structured learning programme was available during which the pupils practised reading and spellings.

4.12.4 **After-School Clubs**

- 4.12.4.1 The Extended Schools initiative also provides participating schools with the opportunity to run after-school clubs. Although most schools do not provide food during these clubs, where this does happen appropriate emphasis is given, in the majority of schools, to ensuring the food provided is healthy.

Case Study 8: After-School Club

In a large urban primary school, children had the opportunity to attend an after-school homework club. A healthy snack and water is provided and ten minutes of physical activity is incorporated before the completion of homework.

- 4.12.4.2 A minority of schools organised a cookery club in their after-school provision.

Case Study 9: After-School Club

In a large urban post-primary school, year 8 pupils had the opportunity to attend an after-school cookery club. Lessons focused on healthier cooking rather than baking to promote healthier food preparation skills. In addition, year 14 form classes completed a unit of work which focused on "grub on a grant" in which they compared the costs of making food with that of buying it pre-prepared.

4.12.5 **Drinking Water**

Pupils were generally allowed to drink water in the classroom. Nearly all pupils had unrestricted access to water at break times and throughout the school day. A minority of schools issue pupils with reusable water bottles and pupils are provided with opportunities to refill them when necessary.

Case Study 10: Drinking Water

In a large rural post-primary school, pupils have easy access to drinking water by means of water dispensers. They can refill water bottles from these dispensers and are permitted to drink water in class. In addition, bottled water can be purchased from vending machines or from the canteen.

4.12.6 **Packed Lunches**

Not all pupils take school meals. Therefore, in order to ensure that consistent messages are communicated to the pupils on healthy eating issues, schools should also develop appropriate policies for the pupils who bring packed lunches. In all schools inspected pupils were able to bring packed lunches from home. A significant minority of primary schools had introduced positive initiatives and provided supporting information to encourage parents to provide a balanced packed lunch. It is more difficult to implement such policies and practices in post-primary schools; however, this should not deter leadership teams in these schools from addressing this issue in whatever way possible.

4.13 **Links with External Agencies/Organisations**

4.13.1 A majority of schools visited supplemented their curricular provision through the effective use of a wide range of external agencies and other health professionals to reinforce the healthy eating messages.

Case Study 11: Links with External Agencies/Organisations

In a large urban primary school the work of the wider community was integrated effectively into the school's healthy eating programme through the schools' involvement in healthy eating competitions run by a local supermarket, hotel, and newspaper.

4.14 **Improvement Through Self-Evaluation**

4.14.1 The quality of whole-school healthy eating programmes can be improved effectively through self-evaluation. A key element of this process is obtaining feedback from governors, parents, teachers and, importantly, the pupils. A significant minority of schools demonstrate strengths in their constructive use of such evaluative feedback to instigate appropriate action to improve the quality of provision. A number of schools, for example, formed School Nutrition Action Groups (SNAGs) to gain response from their pupils on the quality of the school food provision and to involve them in making improvements in the range of healthy options available. In others, the existing school councils were used to obtain pupils' opinions. In the majority of schools visited, however, the whole-school healthy eating

programmes were not monitored or evaluated effectively to ensure ongoing improvements in the quality of provision. The good practice identified in this report should be more widespread.

Case Study 12: Improvement through Self-Evaluation

A large urban post-primary school canteen that had previously presented dishes unattractively and used polystyrene trays and plastic cutlery, changed this practice having heard an effective presentation of evidence by the student council, following a whole-school survey of canteen issues.

4.15 Leadership and Management

- 4.15.1 The *Fit Futures* report makes far-reaching recommendations for immediate action aimed particularly at improving policy on food and the promotion of physical activity. The Department of Education is committed to the recommendations of the report and to the objective that all schools should be healthy schools within the next ten years. In addition, the Education (School Development Plan) Regulations (2005) state that an assessment of the nature and quality of arrangements for health and well-being practices within the school should be included in the SDP. This should incorporate the arrangements for healthy eating. In a significant minority of schools visited this was the case. In the best practice, the SDP was supported by detailed health and well-being action plans which had clear targets and success criteria. This good practice, however, is not widespread enough. It is recommended that ELB advisors should consider the provision of additional training in the school development planning process and health-related issues for school leadership teams to ensure greater consistency in the implementation of the statutory requirements.

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5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 A majority of schools have demonstrated that good, or very good, progress is being made in the implementation of the *Catering for Healthier Lifestyles* programme and the general approaches to promoting healthy eating in schools. A number of key strengths in the provision for healthy eating have been identified in this report. The most important of these are the:

- hard work of school canteen staff and ELBs to meet the requirements of the food-based nutritional standards and the good, or very good, progress being made;
- good start made by the ELBs in the provision of basic training for the staff involved in the preparation and service of school meals to improve nutritional understanding and practice;
- relevant policies which are in place to guide and support the development of healthy eating programmes in the majority of schools;
- many strengths in the approaches to promoting positive lunch time experiences in the majority of schools;
- good, or very good, approaches to catering for specific dietary requirements demonstrated in the majority of schools;
- standards of the pupils' knowledge and understanding of basic nutritional concepts ranged, in a majority of instances, from good to very good;
- good, or very good, range of appropriate food-related health initiatives in place in the majority of schools which help to reinforce effectively key learning objectives relating to food and nutrition, and healthy lifestyles; and
- effective use made by the majority of schools of the support provided by external agencies and other health professionals to reinforce healthy eating.

5.2 In addition to the strengths listed above the report also identifies a number of areas where further improvement is required. The most important of these are the:

- need to include an assessment of the nature and quality of the arrangements for health and well-being practices within SDPs to comply with statutory regulations;
- need for school leadership teams and catering supervisors to ensure that pupils are not excluded from school meals for reasons of special dietary requirements and that the good practice identified in this report relating to the provision of vegetarian options should be more widespread;
- need for healthy choices to be provided for all food in schools to ensure consistent healthy eating approaches are adopted;
- need for ELBs to work more collaboratively to ensure greater consistency in the content and delivery of their training programmes and continue to ensure that all catering supervisors receive updates to their nutrition training. In addition, priority should be given to providing training for catering assistants within dining centres when planning future nutrition training programmes;
- need to address the inconsistencies in menu planning, in particular those relating to the frequency with which fried potato products and garlic bread are made available and the extent to which the menus are balanced nutritionally;
- need for greater consistency in the support and guidance provided to catering supervisors by the ELBs on specific aspects of menu planning and nutritional standards; and
- need for consistent and effective monitoring and evaluation of whole-school healthy eating programmes and policies to ensure ongoing improvement in the quality of provision.

5.3 In much of the good practice highlighted there is a need to ensure that commitments to sustaining the good policies, practices and lessons learned are encouraged, supported and widely disseminated across schools in NI.

- 5.4 The NAs will begin monitoring the implementation of the new nutritional standards, effective from September 2007, and will continue to monitor and promote improvement in the general approaches schools and employing authorities are taking to promote healthy eating.

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APPENDIX

SCHOOLS VISITED IN ACADEMIC YEAR 2006/7

Primary Schools

Altayeskey Primary School, Draperstown, Magherafelt
Ballydown Primary School, Banbridge
Ballyhackett Primary School, Castlerock, Coleraine
Ballykeel Primary School, Ballymena
Ballymoney Model Primary School
Ballynure Primary School, Ballyclare
Belmont Primary School, Belfast
Blythefield Primary School, Belfast
Bunscoil an Traonaigh, Lisnaskea
Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin, Belfast
Cairncastle Primary School, Ballygally, Larne
Corran Integrated Primary School, Larne
Crawfordsburn Primary School, Bangor
Glasswater Primary School, Crossgar, Downpatrick
Culmore Primary School, Londonderry
Derrygonnelly Primary School, Enniskillen
Desertmartin Primary School, Magherafelt
Ebrington Controlled Primary School, Londonderry
Gaelscoil an Damba, Belfast
Garryduff Primary School, Ballymoney
Gilnahirk Primary School, Belfast
Glenann Primary School, Cushendall, Ballymena
Holy Family Primary School, Magherafelt
Holy Trinity Primary School, Cookstown
Kilmaine Primary School, Bangor
Knockahollet Primary School, Dunloy, Ballymena

Limavady Central Primary School
Lourdes Primary School, Whitehead, Carrickfergus
Maine Integrated Primary School, Randalstown
Mossley Primary School, Newtownabbey
Portaferry Integrated Primary School
Poyntzpass Primary School
Rosemount Primary School, Derry
Seymour Hill Primary School, Dunmurry, Belfast
Spa Primary School, Ballynahinch
St Clare's Primary School, Belfast
St Colmcille's Primary School, Omagh
St Columba's Primary School, Clady, Strabane
St Dymphna's Primary School, Dromore, Omagh
St Joseph's Primary School, Galbally, Dungannon
St Malachy's Primary School, Armagh
St Malachy's Primary School, Carnagat, Newry
St Mary's Primary School, Aughlisnafin, Castlewellan
St Mary's Primary School, Ballygawley, Dungannon
St Mary's Primary School (Cloughcor), Ballymagorry, Strabane
St Mary's Primary School, Rathfriland, Newry
St Mary's Primary School, Stewartstown, Dungannon
St Michael's Primary School (Finnis), Dromara, Dromore
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Derry
St Patrick's Primary School, Castlederg
St Patrick's Primary School, Dungannon
St Peter's and St Paul's Primary School, Dungiven, Londonderry
Strandtown Primary School, Belfast
Strathearn School Preparatory Department, Belfast

Post-Primary Schools

Belfast Model School for Girls
Cambridge House Grammar School, Ballymena
Coláiste Feirste, Belfast

Corpus Christi College, Belfast
Dundonald High School, Belfast
Foyle and Londonderry College, Londonderry
Immaculate Conception College, Derry
Lismore Comprehensive School, Drumgask, Craigavon
Little Flower Girls' School, Belfast
St Ciaran's High School, Ballygawley, Dungannon
St Joseph's Grammar School, Donaghmore, Dungannon
St Louise's Comprehensive College, Belfast
St Malachy's High School, Castlewellan
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon
Sullivan Upper School, Holywood

Special Schools

Hill Croft Special School, Newtownabbey
Mitchell House School, Belfast

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