



Department
for Education

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Revised standards for food in schools

Consultation Document

Revised standards for food in schools

This consultation seeks your views on proposed revised food standards in schools.

To All interested parties, including headteachers, teachers, governors, parents, LAs, food manufacturers and suppliers, public health professionals, nutritionists, dieticians, catering managers and cooks, young people, faith organisations and campaign groups

Issued 6 March 2014

Enquiries To If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the Department on 0370 000 2288

e-mail: SchoolFoodStandards.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk

Contact Details

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the Ministerial and Public Communications Division by e-mail: consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the department's '[Contact Us](#)' page.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The current school food standards regulations have been in place since 2007 and are intended to ensure that children get the nutrition they need across the whole school day. The food and drink provided in schools can make an important contribution to the diet of children and young people and have a positive role in helping them develop good eating habits. Having compulsory standards has been proven to increase the take-up of fruit and vegetables and food containing other essential nutrients, such as iron and calcium, while restricting the consumption of fat, sugar and salt.

In the *School Food Plan*¹ the authors, Henry Dimbleby and John Vincent, recommended that we create a clearer set of food-based standards, accompanied by practical guidance, that:

1. provides caterers with a framework on which to build interesting, creative and nutritionally-balanced menus; and
2. is less burdensome and operationally cheaper to implement than the current nutrient-based standards.

Working with nutritionists, school cooks and other experts, Mssrs Dimbleby and Vincent have drawn up revised school food standards. These have been tested by 35 schools and 24 caterers across England. The results of this testing can be viewed at www.schoolfoodplan.com/standards-consultation. This consultation seeks your views on these proposed revised standards.

2 The current standards

- 2.1 The current food based standards are set out in The Education (Nutritional Standards and Requirements for School Food) (England) Regulations 2007, 2008, 2011. These can be found at: www.legislation.gov.uk/all?title=school%20food%20standards. The primary objective of these standards is to create healthy eating habits and ensure that the food served in schools provides the energy and nutrients needed by children during the school day. This is important for all children, but especially for children from disadvantaged households, for whom the school meal might be the most important of the day.
- 2.2 The regulations set out specific food-based and nutrient-based standards with which all local authority (LA) maintained schools and academies set up prior to 2010 must comply. We will be introducing a requirement for new academies to comply with the new school food standards regulations through their funding agreements. Existing academies and free schools set up after 2010 are exempt. As part of their work implementing the School Food Plan, Henry Dimbleby and John Vincent are asking academies which do not have to comply with the regulations to make a voluntary commitment to do so. A number of academy chains have already made this commitment.

¹ School Food Plan, Henry Dimbleby & John Vincent, 2013

The food-based standards determine the types of food and drink a school must offer (and how often it must offer them) and what types of food and drink are restricted or cannot be served. They apply across the school day, including breakfast, mid-morning break, lunchtime and food served after school. The nutrient-based standards set out the overall nutritional values an average lunch should provide. This is measured over a period of between one and four weeks. The nutritional values cover, for example, the minimum level of vitamins and iron required, as well as placing limits on sugar, salt, fat and energy. They only apply at lunchtime.

- 2.3** The current school food standards have had a positive impact. In Britain, the quality of school food improved rapidly after the introduction of the current standards.² This improvement has been particularly marked in relation to major food groups. For example, the number of primary school children eating the required amount of vegetables with their meals rose by almost 15 percentage points, from 59% in 2005 to 74% in 2009³. In secondary schools, the number of children eating starchy food cooked in oil fell by two-thirds between 2004 and 2011. Their meals had at least 30% less fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar than previously.⁴
- 2.4** In primary schools, increases in the levels of vitamin A, folate and fibre were observed after the introduction of nutrient-based standards. The impact was more variable in secondary schools, however. Vitamin A, fibre and calcium intakes all rose, but folate, zinc, iron and vitamin C levels actually decreased slightly in secondary schools. The reasons for this are complex and varied. Iron levels, for example, may have fallen because school meals now contain more vegetables and less meat. This shows that controlling the intake of micronutrients is harder and less predictable than controlling the intake of major food groups.

3 Why change is required

3.1

During their review of school food, Henry Dimbleby and John Vincent found that the regulations as currently set out are difficult to understand and place additional burdens on schools. For example, analysing the nutritional content of menus

² These improvements were an average across the country. Data from the Children's Food Trust shows that many schools are still not compliant with the standards.

³ Haroun, Hall, Nelson et al, Primary School Food Survey 2009, School Food Trust and TNS-bmrb, 2010

⁴ Nelson et al, Secondary school food survey 2011: school lunch provision, selection and consumption, School Food Trust, 2011.

requires a specific computer programme. How this happens varies considerably: a local authority or catering company may have paid a cost of around £9,000 p.a. for a programme for all its schools, some schools may have had help from a local authority food-in-schools nutritionist, and some schools may have paid for recipes to be analysed privately, which can cost about £20 per recipe.

- 3.2** The nutrient-based standards can restrict cooks from being creative. A chef who is asked to cook a three-week nutritionally-approved menu will have little freedom to source seasonal or local food, take advantage of price fluctuations, create dishes that suit his/her particular talents, or cater to the preferences of the children at his/her school.

4 The revised school food standards

- 4.1** The revised school food standards aim to retain the positive impact that the current standards have made, whilst making them easier to understand and implement. The standards have been tested by 31 schools and 24 caterers from across England. The results of the testing were positive:

- 90% of school cooks and 80% of caterers thought the revised standards were easier to understand than the current standards.
- 80% of school cooks and caterers thought they would provide more flexibility: in particular, they felt the revised standards would allow school cooks to create their own menus that the children in their schools could enjoy.
- Nutritionally, in both primary and secondary schools, the menus tested equalled or improved upon the nutritional levels delivered by the current nutrient-based standards. In some areas, improvements were dramatic, such as in the provision of vegetables, which led to better fibre, folate, vitamin A and vitamin C levels in secondary schools. However, the results also showed the need to continue to work to increase iron, zinc and calcium levels in secondary schools.

The full report on the testing can be accessed here:

www.schoolfoodplan.com/standards-consultation

This consultation seeks your views on the one page summary document of the standards and the draft regulations. It is our intention that the one page standards summary will be the main reference point for schools, caterers and others. The detail, from which the summary is drawn, is within the regulations. To respond to

this consultation you will need to consider both documents.

To ensure that the revised standards will work well, we are seeking your views on the following:

Question 1a. Do you think the revised school food standards are clear?

Question 1b. Are there any parts of the standards you think we should clarify further?

Question 2. Do you think the revised school food standards are flexible enough to provide interesting, creative and varied menus?

Question 3. Do you foresee any significant practical difficulties in implementing the revised school food standards? What could be done to overcome these issues?

Question 4a. Would you find it helpful to have access to practical guidance on implementing the revised standards?

Question 4b. Are there any particular issues you would like to see covered in the guidance?

Question 5. Any further comments?

4.2 Annex A: The proposed standards

The proposed standards can be downloaded from the Department's consultation website: www.education.gov.uk/consultations

4.3 Annex B: Draft school food regulations

The draft school food regulations can be downloaded from the Department's consultation website: www.education.gov.uk/consultations

5 How To Respond

5.1 Consultation responses can be completed online at:
www.education.gov.uk/consultations

by emailing: SchoolFoodStandards.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk

or send by post to:

Sue White

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Department for Education

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6 Additional Copies

- 6.1** Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from the Department for Education e-consultation website at:

www.education.gov.uk/consultations

7 Plans for making results public

- 7.1** The results of the consultation and the department's response will be published on the DfE e-consultation website in summer 2014.