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[Department
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Guidance

School food: guidance for governors

Updated 7 February 2023

Applies to England

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Role of governing body in school food

The governing board are responsible for the provision of school food. As a governor you play a crucial role in creating and embedding a great school food culture.

It is the statutory responsibility of the governing body and trustees to ensure the [School Food Standards](#) are being met and [Ofsted](#) are putting a much greater focus on how schools are creating a culture and ethos of healthy eating.

A great school food culture improves children's health and academic performance. Increasing the take-up of school meals is also better for your school's finances. A half-empty dining hall – like a half-empty restaurant – is certain to lose money.

Getting more families to choose school meals requires a cultural change within your school. It means:

- providing tasty food that looks good and is nutritious

- creating a positive dining experience
- getting the price right
- allowing children to eat with their friends
- and instilling a love of cooking and growing

The headteacher can lead this transformation but they also need support from their governors and leadership team.

The Department for Education recommends that all governors “work with the senior leadership team to develop a whole school food policy that sets out the school’s approach to its provision of food, food education (including practical cooking), the role of the catering team as part of the wider school team and the school’s strategy to increase the take-up of school lunches.

Food is a great way for your school to engage with and support your local community. You might:

- reach out to community members to help your school set up cooking and gardening clubs
- share an allotment with local families
- invite community members in for lunch or to sell produce at school events

There are also many national and local authority initiatives which schools can access, including:

- [Change4Life](#)
- [National School Meals Week](#)
- [British Nutrition Foundation Healthy Eating Week](#)

Other initiatives and programmes, to help schools transform food culture and promote healthy lifestyles, are showcased at [What Works Well](#).

Your school has a unique role to help children learn and develop good healthy eating habits for life, creating happier, healthier adults of the future.

Ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction

You should:

- ensure that school food is included within the remit of one of the governing body’s committees as part of the school’s wider health and wellbeing strategy
- ask the senior leadership team to develop and review a whole school food policy which includes a healthy packed lunch, vending and drinks policy
- check what continuing professional development training is in place for all teachers and support staff to support their knowledge of health and wellbeing
- see how the lunchtime experience contributes to the culture and ethos of the school when making a school visit
- have a member of the governing body attend school council and School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG) meetings
- ask the SNAG and school council to provide feedback on the quality and enjoyment of school food and overall lunchtime experience

Hold the headteacher to account and support leadership

You should:

- work through the questions in the School Food Plan's practical guidance with your school leaders, creating a culture and ethos of healthy eating
- check with the headteacher and catering manager that standards are being met across the whole school day
- ask how your catering staff are supported and integrated into school life
- ensure there is enough timetabling, space and practical resources (equipment, ingredients)
- find out how the school budget and charging policy makes provision so all pupils can access ingredients and resources for cooking

Oversee the financial performance of the school and make sure money is well spent

You should:

- obtain and review meal take up data each term
- work with your senior leadership team to identify trends and issues and create a plan for increasing take up
- establish what action you could take to improve the quality and take up of meals
- ask the senior leadership team and business manager to review the current pupil premium sign-up system and look at good practice to help maximise registrations - you can read the [free school meals guidance](#)
- ask the senior leadership team and business manager to conduct a review of the current catering contract and ensure the specification is appropriate and that the terms are being met – where they are not being met, establish what improvement action will be taken

The contract specification should include the School Food Standards, Professional Standards, food quality and lunchtime experience.

The [get help buying for schools](#) service is made up of various resources to help you buy goods and services efficiently and compliantly. This is a free advice and guidance service for [state schools](#) which could help to save you money on your existing contracts.

Useful resources

- [The School Food Plan What Works Well](#)
- [DfE's Guidance on School Food for Governors](#)
- [The School Food Plan's Headteacher checklist](#)
- [School Food Standards Guidance document](#)

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