

# Good Food for Small Schools

## *A Practical Toolkit*



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# Introduction

Getting school food right is fundamental to giving our children the best possible start in life. Providing children with a balanced, tasty and nutritious school lunch has been proven to impact positively on behaviour and attainment, as well as encouraging children to eat healthily.

Schools of all sizes can, and should, make the changes necessary to create a positive school food culture. By taking a whole school approach and ensuring school food is understood and embedded throughout the curriculum you will be able to deliver the very best outcomes for children.

Now, with the introduction of the government's Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) policy in 2014, all schools have a legal responsibility to provide pupils in reception, year 1 and year 2 with a school meal that meets the school food standards. So exploring how you can improve your school food, as well as your school food culture, has never been more important.

Small schools are defined as those with less than 150 pupils on roll. When it comes to providing school food there are benefits to the strong links many small schools have with their local community, while a smaller number of pupils can be an advantage for small schools keen to fully involve every child in a whole school approach to healthy eating. By playing to their strengths and involving all stakeholders, small schools can achieve sustained success in school food provision.

Yet small schools also face considerable and specific challenges if they are to deliver an affordable and quality school food service for their pupils. The School Food Plan, published in 2013, found small schools, serving less than 100 meals a day, seldom break-even because of the fixed costs of catering in each school.

As each small school is different we are aware there is no "one size fits all" solution. This toolkit highlights examples of good practice, shares innovative ideas and signposts to organisations able to help small schools to offer their pupils the best school food.

Drawing on lessons learnt from schools all over England, this toolkit is designed to offer inspiration and practical help to small schools looking to improve their school food and wider school food culture.

# The School Food Plan

The School Food Plan, published in 2013, outlines the action taken by government and other diverse organisations to support head teachers to improve food in schools. You can find out more by watching a short film by following this link <http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/film/> or reading the plan: [http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/School\\_Food\\_Plan\\_2013.pdf](http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/School_Food_Plan_2013.pdf)

It recommends these guiding principles to all schools looking to make practical changes to make their school food better:

- The head teacher should play a vital role in leading the change
- Concentrate on the things children care about
- Adopt a whole school approach
- Engage all stakeholders through the process.

There are also lots of useful resources from the School Food Plan to help you to take action to improve your school food:

- Guidance to help you meet the school food standards:  
<http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/standards/>
- A checklist for head teachers:  
<http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/checklist/>
- Guidance for governors on school food:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/standards-for-school-food-in-england>
- Guidance on the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework requirement for schools to Create a Culture and Ethos of Healthy Eating:  
<http://whatworkswell.schoolfoodplan.com/>
- A 'What Works Well' website featuring great case studies and resources to help you improve your school food culture:  
<http://whatworkswell.schoolfoodplan.com>

# Getting Started:

## *Funding and advice available to small schools*

All schools can benefit from specialist help and support when introducing a school food service or looking to improve their school food. There is plenty of expert advice, as well as some funding, available to help you to plan and invest in the best possible solutions for your small school.

### **Funding allocations for small schools**

Recognition of the considerable additional challenges faced by small schools implementing UIFSM resulted in funding totalling £22.5 million for small schools in the 2014 to 2015 financial year. In 2015-16 each small school has been allocated a £2,300 subsidy. Schools can choose how to use this funding to support implementation of the policy and it will not be adjusted depending on take-up. You can find out more at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-infant-free-school-meals-guide-for-schools-and-local-authorities> and

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-infant-free-school-meals-uifsm-funding-allocations-2015-to-2016>

### **Revenue Funding**

In total the government allocated £393.5 million of revenue funding in the 2014 to 2015 financial year, and £590 million in the 2015 to 2016 financial year, to support the implementation of UIFSM. Revenue funding is based on a rate of £2.30 for each meal taken by newly eligible pupils.

### **Local authority funding**

Small schools may also be able to access funding from local authority school maintenance and improvement budgets. Contact your local authority to find out more.

### **UIFSM Support service**

Throughout 2014 and 2015 the Children's Food Trust and the Lead Association for Catering in Education (LACA) provided a telephone and online UIFSM advice service for all organisations requiring support. Direct support was available for any school facing issues relating to the implementation of UIFSM. Advisers delivering this support worked with schools of all sizes, including small schools.

### **Advice and ideas from small schools**

To read case studies from other small schools about their approaches to delivering a successful school meals service visit:

<http://whatworkswell.schoolfoodplan.com/search?q=small+schools>

# Good food for small schools:

## *Menus and suppliers to meet your needs*

Whatever option small schools choose to provide their school food, being able to serve nutritious, affordable and tasty food that children want to eat relies on getting your menus right and opting for suppliers that are flexible enough to meet the needs of small schools.

There are a wide variety of seasonal menu and recipe ideas available to help you and, with careful research and planning, you should be able to source suppliers that will work for your school, whatever its needs. Appropriate solutions will vary depending on your school situation; whether you have a full production kitchen, a finishing kitchen or no kitchen at all we have ideas that can help you serve food that meets everyone's needs.

### **If your school has a production kitchen**

- Develop your menus to ensure you're offering a choice of simple, familiar favourites that appeal to children and meet the school food standards. The Children's Food Trust has devised compliant menus that can be scaled down to work for small schools.
- If cooking every element of your menu from scratch is too expensive or impractical because of limited space, look into using "cook-chill" or frozen food as the main part of the meal, complemented with freshly prepared food, such as vegetables, bread, fruit and salad.
- Join forces with other local schools to bulk-buy ingredients and benefit from economies of scale, making your school food service more affordable. Collaboration can give small schools greater flexibility with procurement.
- Use an online ordering system to manage your stock efficiently and keep food and administration costs down.
- Encourage parents and children to pre-order their school meals from for example a 3 week menu cycle. This will save money and cut down on food waste.
- Use local suppliers to source fresh produce wherever possible. However working with flexible larger suppliers too can sometimes be cheaper and reduce administration costs.
- If you have a school gardening club, or even just grow herbs on a classroom windowsill, use any home grown produce in your menus. Children love to eat what they have grown.
- Research and talk to your suppliers to make sure they can deliver quantities of food that work for your menu. If pack sizes are too big you may have problems storing food, in both cupboards and freezers, and run the risk of increased food waste.
- Choose suppliers who are accredited and recognised for the quality and standard of their products. For example look for the Good Egg Award, the Food for Life Catering Mark and the Red Tractor mark. Tell parents and children about them to boost the reputation of your school meals. You could also consider working towards your own school food award, for example the Children's Food Trust Award.
- Even small schools need to be prepared to meet the needs of pupils who may have special diets or food allergies. There is plenty of advice out there for in-house catering teams or suppliers to ensure all children's needs are met.
- Run taster sessions for parents, as well as children, to showcase your school food. Opportunities to taste dishes on your menu can tackle negative preconceptions about school meals and lead to increased uptake.

### **Lessons learnt from small schools with a production kitchen**

At Mickley First School in Northumberland a dedicated school cook takes ownership of the meal service, teaming up with six other local schools to bulk-buy and reduce food costs.

[www.schoolfoodplan.com/mickley-first-school](http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/mickley-first-school)

***“We found a local butcher, fruit and veg supplier and a wholesaler who would supply goods in the small amounts we needed and didn’t have a minimum spend. We work hard to procure the best quality ingredients in order to produce great meals within a budget – there is such a fine line between profit and loss.”***

Jo Wotton, The Saints’ Way Church of England Multi-Academy Trust in Bodmin

***“Because our meals are pre-ordered, there is no over-production or food wastage.”***

Gina Finch, Executive Head at the Flying Start Federation in North Devon.

### **If your school has a finishing kitchen or no kitchen at all**

For many small schools offering hot school meals by working with a hub kitchen or central production unit (CPU) can be the most viable option. Hub kitchens either cook and deliver hot food to the school or work on a “regeneration” system where quickly chilled or frozen food is transported to the school for re-heating.

### **Possible approaches**

- Hub kitchens or CPUs are run either by local authorities, private contractors or social enterprises. Research the best options in your area and talk to other local schools to find out if you can work together.
- Establish a positive, proactive relationship with your suppliers. Take the time to review the service and meet regularly, perhaps once every half term.
- Consider how your transported or regenerated meals can be supplemented with fresh vegetables, fruit, bread and desserts cooked or prepared on site.
- Consider delivery times and frequency carefully to avoid food being stored for too long.
- If your school has more than 100 pupils and you have some internal or external space, you could talk to your local authority about developing a production kitchen. Though an initial capital investment will be needed, it is generally cheaper to produce meals in-house, whether from scratch or regenerated, rather than relying on daily hot transported meals.

### **Lessons learnt from small schools without a production kitchen**

1. Two small primary schools in rural Lincolnshire worked together to organise an affordable transported hot meal service from their local secondary school’s production kitchen. The schools have moved from offering packed lunches only to almost all their pupils enjoying a hot meal each lunchtime.
2. St Lawrence CE Primary School in Telford turned a cupboard into a kitchen, allowing the school to create an affordable and sustainable school meals service and build greater ties with the local community.
3. Brocklesby Park Primary in Lincolnshire is located in a remote rural area and has just 15 pupils. With support from a meal supplier and minimal investment in equipment, including an induction hob, fridge freezer and a few cooking utensils the school now successfully offers hot main meals, supplemented by fruit, vegetables, bread and desserts provided by a local wholesaler.

### **Further information and support**

- Children’s Food Trust and the School Food Plan team have devised tasty and nutritious menus and recipes that will appeal to children and meet the school food standards. Visit:  
<http://whatworkswell.schoolfoodplan.com/articles/category/52/recipes-menus>  
<http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/childrens-food-trust/schools/schools-resources/>
- Advice on meeting the School Food Standards:  
<http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/childrens-food-trust/schools/school-food-standards/standards-for-your-school-food/>
- The Learning Network Understanding Food Standards Course:  
<http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/understanding-and-meeting-the-standards-for-school-food/>

- Advice on managing requests for special diets and food allergies:  
<http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/childrens-food-trust/schools/school-food-standards/standards-for-your-school-food/allergies-special-diets/>
- A range of commercial companies offer online ordering and stock management systems suitable for use by small schools.
- A range of commercial companies offer quality cook-chill or frozen meal solutions suitable for use by small schools. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has produced a toolkit to help those who buy food and catering services for the public sector. Read more:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/food-buying-standards-for-the-public-sector-the-plan-toolkit>
- The Children's Food Trust has advice on buying healthier food and ingredients:  
<http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/childrens-food-trust/schools/school-food-standards/resources/advice-on-buying-healthier-food-and-ingredients/>
- The Great School Lunch has a range of free resources available on menus, suppliers and procurement:  
<http://www.thegreatschoolslunch.co.uk/uifsm-free-resources-for-you>
- The Children's Food Trust Award is open to small schools:  
<http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/childrens-food-trust/what-we-do/what-we-offer/award/>
- Find out more about the Soil Association Food for Life Catering Mark and the Food for Life Schools Award at [www.foodforlife.org.uk](http://www.foodforlife.org.uk)

# Investing in your staff and volunteers:

## *Recruiting, motivating and training*

Small schools who have established successful school food services often rely on the combined efforts of a team of motivated staff and committed volunteers drawn from the school community. So finding and investing in the right staff and volunteers is vital.

### **Possible approaches**

- Whether you are recruiting new staff or looking to invest in your existing team, use resources like the school food workforce professional standards, as well as researching the quality training that's available locally and nationally, to ensure you get the right mix of skills and experience.
- If you introduce new equipment into your kitchen make sure your staff and volunteers are fully trained so they feel comfortable using it.
- Some small schools in rural areas have struggled to recruit qualified school cooks. An alternative is to advertise the role with an entry level requirement and then invest fully in training to ensure your catering team has the skills you'll need.
- A whole school approach to school food is the best recipe for success. Involve your teaching staff in your plans and explore the possibilities an onsite kitchen offers for delivering the wider curriculum. For example giving children the opportunity in lessons to make the dough which will later be baked into their bread rolls for lunch.
- Roles and responsibilities can become blurred in small schools, where an “all hands on deck” approach is necessary. Make sure there is a clear leader on school food and everyone in the team is clear about their own, and others', responsibilities.
- Make sure your volunteers are fully trained and supported, so they have the right skills and tools to do their job well. It is good practice to ensure all staff and volunteers working with food have a Level 2 qualification in both Food Hygiene and Nutrition. Why not award any certificates they gain in a school assembly to recognise their contribution in front of the whole school?
- Effective communication with your stakeholders is crucial to getting everyone involved and feeling positive about your school food service. Explain why school food is so important, how you are taking a whole school approach to healthy eating and then ask parents and families, governors and other members of the local community if they can volunteer to help with your school food service.
- Volunteers can make a contribution in all sorts of ways, as well as hands-on roles in the kitchen or dining room they could help to organise events or fundraise to support your school food service.

### **Lessons learnt from small schools**

1. Teamwork and dedication, mixed with innovation and fundraising, has led to school food taking its place at the heart of a small school. The school food success of The Saints' Way Church of England Multi-Academy Trust in Bodmin has relied upon collaborative action from directors, governors, heads, a business manager, catering staff and parents. Together staff and volunteer supporters have come up with innovative ideas to generate extra income to support the school food service. Kitchens have been used to host community lunches, they've run pizza and curry take-away nights and bake and sell their own bread.
2. Fundraising in the local community kick-started a new school kitchen supplying meals to 4 small schools. When UIFSM was introduced Haddenham St Mary's School in Buckinghamshire had no school meals provision, no kitchen and no funds to build one. Headteacher Karen Collett worked with parents and local businesses to set up a “food and growing” group. Together they raised money to build a school kitchen, as well as digging school allotments so the children could grow and eat their own produce. Once the school had kick-started the plans, the local authority agreed to invest in a new kitchen if Haddenham St Mary's supplied food to two or more other rural schools. The result of this project - Homemade@Haddenham – now supplies quality hot school meals to 300 children at 4 different small schools.

## Further information and support

- LACA has produced professional standards for the school food workforce outlining the skills and competence expected of all school catering staff. Read more:  
<http://www.laca.co.uk/news/professional-standards-school-food-workforce-launched-laca-chair-carrieanne-bishop-main-event>
- Your local college is a good place to start for training opportunities for your staff. The following national organisations offer training for school cooks and catering staff, as well as volunteers working with food:
  - Children's Food Trust:  
<http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/childrens-food-trust/schools/training-for-schools/>  
including the Level 2 Food Hygiene and Nutrition qualifications recommended for all volunteers
  - Food for Life Partnership:  
<http://www.foodforlife.org.uk/>
  - Chartered Institute for Environmental Health:  
<http://www.cieh.org/training.html>
  - APSE:  
<http://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/training/current-training-course/>
  - Unison:  
<https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/learning-and-training/>
  - The Safer Food Group:  
<http://www.thesaferfoodgroup.com/>
- Volunteering England has created a good practice bank to support schools and organisations working with volunteers. Read more:  
<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/goodpractice>
- Find out more about the Learning Network Lunchtime Supervisor Training Course:  
<http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/childrens-food-trust/schools/learning-network/courses/lunchtime-supervisor-training/>

# Getting your food on the table:

## *Logistics and equipment*

For small schools a lack of suitable space to prepare, cook and serve food can be a substantial barrier to offering a school food service. However there are organisations offering innovative and cost-effective solutions to small schools, as well as trusted sources of expert advice for schools feeling daunted about which option to choose. From kitchen pods to sharing facilities available in your local community, there are viable alternatives available.

### **Possible approaches**

- If your vision for school food means you will need to install or upgrade your kitchen and equipment, take time to audit what you already have, map out what you think you will need and research possible suppliers. It is good practice to get at least three quotes to ensure you are securing the best deal for your school.
- There are commercial suppliers who have designed kitchen pods specifically for use in small schools which can either be bought or hired. Some companies will offer a site visit to assess your school's needs and recommend a solution. Alternatively you could work with a specialist adviser from an organisation like the Children's Food Trust who can help you to map out what's needed to best meet the unique needs of your school.
- If you do opt for a kitchen pod or a production kitchen, don't forget to consider the supporting services that will need to be in place for your kitchen to function, for example drainage, gas, water and electricity.
- It's good practice to involve your local authority Food Safety Officer in any planned changes to your kitchen design and equipment.
- If the upfront capital investment for installing a production kitchen is not feasible, an alternative is to hire kitchen equipment to allow you to deliver a school food service. Choosing to hire has the advantage of spreading payments over time which can be budgeted for year on year. It also allows schools to test and change equipment according to their needs as their food service becomes more established.
- Some small schools have developed a successful school food service by sharing catering facilities available in their local community, for example the kitchen in a village hall or by working with the local pub to produce hot meals suitable for children. Read more:  
<http://whatworkswell.schoolfoodplan.com/site/article-files/b54437cd-4425-45ec-800f-77b9fb5b8f8e.pdf>

### **Lessons learnt from small schools**

Production kitchens can be created in the smallest of places. St Helena's CE Primary School is a small rural primary in Lincolnshire with 112 pupils. In just 10 weeks they installed a kitchen from scratch using the space taken up by 3 cupboards. Work was carried out during term time with minimal disruption. The kitchen produces 100-120 meals per day and runs at an average daily take-up of 65% (break-even point is 45%).

### **Further information and support**

- CEDA is the Catering Equipment Distributors Association. It has a list of accredited members that adhere to its Customer Charter and Code of Good Practice. Visit <http://www.ceda.co.uk/>
- Your local authority may have a framework contract in place for kitchen equipment.
- Further options for improving your kitchen are listed here:  
[www.schoolfoodplan.com/school-kitchens](http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/school-kitchens)
- There are lots of useful free resources here:  
<http://www.thegreatschoolslunch.co.uk/uifsm-free-resources-for-you>
- Advice and support is available from the Children's Food Trust:  
<http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/childrens-food-trust/schools/get-help/we-can-help/>

# The school meals experience:

## *Managing lunch breaks and making the most of your space*

As well as the obvious nutritional benefits to children's health and well-being, eating a tasty meal together at lunchtime can be an opportunity for children to enhance their social skills and enjoy eating with friends. Even in a small school, where there may be specific challenges around space and supervision, there are often small changes that can be made to improve the lunchtime experience.

### **Possible approaches**

- Start by asking children for their opinion about what works and doesn't work during lunchtime at your school. They are your customers, so finding out what they think is a vital step towards designing a better lunchtime.
- Involve children in managing your lunchtimes. Introduce lunch buddies where older children are paired with younger pupils, a family style service approach or a waiter system giving older pupils responsibility for serving. All these options help to develop a sociable lunchtime experience which can encourage more children to choose school meals.
- Make your dining space as appealing to children as possible. Make sure it's somewhere you'd like to eat your lunch! Try giving your dining environment a name, a logo and a colour scheme that can be used consistently for table cloths, signs and free standing mobile screens.
- Give children a choice about where to sit wherever possible, allowing children to sit with their friends regardless of whether they have chosen a school meal or a packed lunch.
- Noise can be a problem at lunchtime even in small schools, but children will enjoy their food more in a sociable environment with their friends. There are acoustic management solutions available, from simply playing low level background music to investing in ceiling hung banners or sound clouds
- Staff eating with children sets a good example and shows that even teachers love school food! By offering staff a free lunch in return for their time eating with the children everybody benefits.
- Don't underestimate the importance of your midday supervisors. Friendly, positive and well trained staff can make a huge difference to lunchtime. Make sure you're aware of the professional standards for midday supervisors and the tailored training available.
- Invest in bespoke equipment like salad bars, waste disposal stations and trolleys that help to keep your dining space clean and efficient.
- Make sure your food is attractively displayed so all the children can see the choices available. Displaying pictures of the day's menu choice on boards before the children reach the servery can speed the queue up and provide reassurance to children about the meal they are going to receive.
- Even small schools need to make sure children aren't waiting too long for their food. Consider staggering your lunch break for different age groups or introduce a pre-ordering or coloured band system to keep queues to a minimum. A pre-ordering system can also help kitchen staff to manage portion control and ensure pupils have their first choice of meal.

### **Further information and support**

- Read more about improving your dining environment:  
<http://www.thegreatschoolslunch.co.uk/uifsm-free-resources-for-you>
- Read more about one school's success with a pre-ordering wristband system:  
<http://whatworkswell.schoolfoodplan.com/site/article-files/29f3b870-86e5-4fcf-a8a9-afb7dcc56874.pdf>
- Read success stories about improving school dining areas:  
<http://whatworkswell.schoolfoodplan.com/articles/category/49/improving-the-dining-area>
- Read more about the Learning Network Lunchtime Supervisor Training Course:  
<http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/childrens-food-trust/schools/learning-network/courses/lunchtime-supervisor-training/>