

### School Meal Review Panel

#### Recommendations

##### The standards

**Recommendation 1:** The nutrient and food and drink standards proposed in this Report should be adopted and applied to the provision of school lunches.

**Recommendation 2:** Food provided at lunchtime in schools should meet the combination of nutrient and food-based standards over a period of five consecutive school days.

**Recommendation 3:** Schools should aspire to achieve the highest quality of provision, which is a hot meal, cooked on-site, from fresh and seasonal ingredients. Whilst we accept that this level of provision is not possible to achieve in all schools at present, we recommend that schools work towards this.

**Recommendation 4:** At present only the school lunch standards are statutory. The Panel recommends that pre-school and children in other settings, should be similarly protected. It recommends that the Government, as a priority, supplements these lunch standards with standards for other food and drink service provision: break-time snacks, breakfast and after school clubs.

**Recommendation 5:** The panel recommends to schools that, from September 2006, the food standards be applied to lunch time and that similar standards for 'processed foods'; 'confectionery and savoury snacks'; and 'drinks' be applied to tuck shops, vending and other similar food services. The panel recognises that meeting the voluntary Target Nutrient Specifications for processed foods will require some product development and therefore may take longer.

**Recommendation 6:** School caterers should ensure that choice is available for all children right through to the end of lunchtime service in order that children eating later in the food service are not disadvantaged.

**Recommendation 7:** There should be easy access to free, fresh, chilled drinking water throughout the school day.

**Recommendation 8:** The procurement of food served in schools should be consistent with sustainable development principles and schools and caterers should look to local farmers and suppliers for their produce where possible, tempered by a need for menus to meet the new nutritional standards and be acceptable in schools.

**Recommendation 9:** The standards should be reviewed in 2011. At this time the standards should be applied to food consumption as well as food provision.

**Recommendation 10:** The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) should encourage schools to adopt the voluntary target nutrient specifications circulated for consultation by the Food Standards Agency.

### **Delivering Change**

#### **Catering:**

**Recommendation 11:** Schools and caterers should conduct a needs analysis (skills, equipment, preparation time) and train all relevant staff (including catering staff and midday supervisors) to ensure they are able to support pupils in making healthy choices.

**Recommendation 12:** Catering staff need to be central to the whole school approach. Their practical skills should be valued and utilised to the full, and they should be represented on groups like School Nutrition Action Groups.

#### **Schools:**

**Recommendation 13:** All schools should audit their current food service and curriculum, and develop, implement and publish a whole-school food and nutrition policy. The Panel recommends that schools' whole-school food policies should be made available to parents and carers and be referred to in the school prospectus and school profile.

**Recommendation 14:** All children should be taught food preparation and practical cooking skills in school in the context of healthy eating. Far more emphasis should be placed on practical cooking skills within the curriculum space currently devoted to Food Technology, and the KS3 review should consider this.

**Recommendation 15:** Supply links between local producers and schools should be strengthened, with improvements to children's knowledge about growing and cooking food. Schools should be encouraged to visit farms, ideally where some of their food is produced.

**Recommendation 16:** Whole-school food policies, developed through partnerships, should include consideration of the impact of packed lunches and food brought into school. However, where parents and carers wish to continue with packed lunches, guidance is available from the Food Standards Agency.

## **Getting started**

**Recommendation 17:** The introduction of the new standards should be phased in over a period of time to allow the necessary preparation. Implementation will be more difficult in some schools (e.g. where there is a cash-cafeteria food service). The new standards should be fully achieved as soon as possible, and at the latest, for all primary schools by September 2008 and for all secondary schools by September 2009.

**Recommendation 18:** Schools and local authorities should aim for complete take-up of free school meal entitlement; and schools should aim to have at least 10% increase in school meals take-up by the end of the implementation period.

**Recommendation 19:** Further tools and guidance need to be developed, tested, and made available as early in the implementation process as possible. The DfES should take the lead on this.

**Recommendation 20:** The Food Standards Agency (FSA) should make its food composition data, including any relating to non-milk extrinsic sugars, widely available in an electronic format. This will provide information on foods and nutrients contained in the standards, expressed using analytical or calculation methods which reflect the needs of the standards.

## **Financial investment**

**Recommendation 21:** The Secretary of State should take note of our concerns that low income families may be adversely affected by price increases, and investigate options for mitigating possible nutritional and economic risks.

**Recommendation 22:** Schools and local authorities must improve transparency and accountability in relation to how much they spend on school meals, including food cost per meal; uptake; free school meal numbers; nature of service; level of any subsidy; and any surplus generated by the service and how it is spent. This information should be presented in the whole-school food policy.

**Recommendation 23:** There should be no further degradation of service or provision by individual schools or local authorities from the current position, and kitchens should be a priority under 'Building Schools for the Future'. The DfES should undertake further work to consider the options for schools which no longer have their own kitchens. Schools and local authorities should be encouraged to reach the highest standards of provision and kitchens should be a priority in all schools' capital investment programmes.

**Recommendation 24:** Guidance on formulaic funding delivered to local authorities and schools should prioritise the renovation and refurbishment of kitchens and dining facilities.

**Recommendation 25:** The Government needs to ensure that current Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts and 'Building Schools for the Future' (BSF) initiatives do not impose barriers to the improvement of school food and also ensure that in future all school PFIs incorporate building specifications which enable the main meal to be cooked on the premises and practical cooking skills to be taught to all pupils. The Government should require all partners in PFI deals to be bound by the new standards. The existence of long-term contracts cannot be allowed to adversely affect the health of pupils in PFI schools.

**Recommendation 26:** The Panel suggests that kitchens and dining areas should be given priority within primary capital investment.

**Recommendation 27:** The economic costs of the changes should be modelled against the economic benefits. For example the benefits include: sourcing more food from local suppliers will benefit local economies and cut down transport and infrastructure costs; using more fresh ingredients will require longer kitchen assistant hours and this will benefit catering staff; the possible link between better nutrition, educational attainment and associated life-time earnings gain.

**Recommendation 28:** DfES has asked all local authorities to revise their asset management plan data by the end of this year. This information should show-up deficiencies in kitchen and dining areas but will not, due to timing, reflect then standards and approach recommended in this report. We recommend that DfES should (i) consider what further work needs to be done to supplement the information gathered from current activity; (ii) use this information to ensure that kitchen and dining areas are a priority in capital spending programmes; and (iii) ensure that all future asset planning takes the new SMRP standards and approach fully into account.

**Recommendation 29:** In line with the Government's expectation that the transformation of school meals should be led by local authorities, we recommend that local level discussions recognise the desirability of phased – as opposed to sudden - price increases.

**Recommendation 30:** The Government should make school meals a priority during the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

**Recommendation 31:** At appropriate intervals (eg. of 4 years) a nationwide evaluation of school food provision should be commissioned by DfES, to assess the types of foods and drinks available, their uptake and nutrient contribution to the overall diet. The evaluation should pay particular attention to provision for children who are nutritionally at risk. This evaluation should be timed for completion before the review of the standards in 2011.

**Recommendation 32:** The main approach to external monitoring and evaluation should be through the regular inspections carried out by Ofsted.

This should be supported by evidence gathered from the in-depth inspections of a sample of schools carried out by HM Inspectors, supported by nutritionists. The Panel recommends further work should be conducted by Ofsted and DfES to use the pilot inspections planned for November 2005 to develop the methodology and a rigorous set of tools to support those inspections.

**Recommendation 33:** A checklist should be developed, as part of the package of further tools and guidance. It should be piloted to ensure it is effective in bringing about change and supporting implementation of the nutrient and food standards.

**Recommendation 34:** Local authorities should be required to collect and report annually on progress in achieving healthy school standards, provision and uptake of all (including free) school lunches, and steps being taken to work towards the achievement of school lunch standards e.g. use of nutrition software, checklists, smartcards, incorporation of standards in contracts. The DfES should collect and collate this data to provide a national overview of progress.

**Recommendation 35:** The School Food Trust should hold a database of standards compliant menus for schools to use at their discretion; and standard analysis services which would support schools in providing and analysing their own meals service.