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Dear Mr Stephenson

Ofsted Survey Inspection Programme 2006/7: Healthier Eating in Schools

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 31 January to look at your overall work on promoting healthier eating and the provision of school meals within this.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our evaluation and reporting. Any published report is likely to list the names of the institutions visited but we will not identify individual institutions within the report itself.

I undertook to provide a brief written version of the main points made in my feedback at the end of the visit. The evidence used to inform the judgements below comprised interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of school documentation, a short lesson observation, a sample analysis of pupils' work, and observation of eating arrangements at both breaktime and lunchtime. I also ate a school meal myself.

I am obviously conscious in making the judgements below that the school will be moving soon into new accommodation and that this will greatly improve the facilities for catering and dining. However, not all the desirable developments highlighted below will necessarily be delivered by these improvements alone.

The overall effectiveness of the school's provision is adequate with some good features.

- The standard of school meals

This is satisfactory overall. The content of the meals meets the required standards and the quality of the food at the point of consumption is

satisfactory. This having been said, the take-up of paid meals is low and declining. Whilst the limitations of the current dining arrangements are a consideration in this, the key factors appear to be the combination of price and choice. The 'full meals only' policy means that full price has to be paid, whether or not the pupil wants all the component parts of the meal. For those who do not, what they do eat can, therefore, seem expensive. The low take-up of meals means that they play only a limited part in helping to ensure that pupils actually eat healthily.

- The quality of the dining experience

This is satisfactory. Serving and dining are well managed within the constraints of the limited accommodation, although the latter makes it difficult to ensure that dining itself is a positive social and learning experience. However, the wide range of recreational and voluntary learning activities provided for pupils after they have eaten is a real strength, as is the involvement of so many members of the teaching staff. Relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils and pupils are good and pupils are well behaved throughout the premises.

- Helping pupils and parents to make healthier choices

This is satisfactory. The presentation of menu choices in the form of full meals at least ensures that pupils choosing to have a school lunch are presented with a balanced meal. However, as explained above, these represent quite a small proportion of the school roll. No advice is provided to parents on the content of lunchboxes. This is potentially very significant in overall healthy eating terms, given how many pupils bring such lunches.

- Developing pupils' knowledge and personal skills

This is satisfactory. Pupils have a good grasp of the key principles of healthy eating and of basic hygiene rules. However, the current toilet and washing facilities are poor. There has been a long term involvement of the school council with school meals issues and this has led to some improvements to the dining arrangements. However, the school does not conduct regular questionnaire surveys of pupil views and this limits the ability to identify clear trends.

- Teaching about healthier eating

This is good. Weekly lesson planning documents for personal, social and health education (PSHE), science, and food technology all have appropriately detailed references to nutrition and healthy eating. A useful contribution is also made by the school nurse. Staff teaching science and food technology consistently use the same terminology, emphasising the key principle of food intake 'balance'. However, there is a need for PSHE teachers to come into line with this.

- Planning the curriculum

This is satisfactory. There is no overall healthy eating policy, although one is under development. However, the current draft does not encompass all aspects of food provision at the school and the management of lunchtimes overall. There is satisfactory awareness of what else needs to be done to complete the policy development process.

- Managing the school's approach to healthier eating

This is satisfactory. Leadership of the initiative to achieve the National Healthy Schools Standard is satisfactory. The pastoral system is effective in identifying and supporting pupils whose eating habits give substantial cause for concern. However, there is little systematic monitoring of children's eating habits more widely or evaluation of the impact of the school's provision in such respects.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- the development of a healthy eating policy which encompasses all relevant aspects of the school's provision
- the use by PSHE teachers of a conceptual model for healthy eating which is consistent with that used in science and food technology
- the provision of guidance to parents on the content of packed lunches
- more systematic evaluation of the impact of the school's activities on what children actually eat.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to promote healthier eating in the school.

As I explained during the feedback, this letter will be copied to your local authority and will be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

John Cordwell
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools