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Mr D O'Neill
Headteacher
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Dear Mr O'Neill

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 06 November 2006 to look at your work on healthier eating and school meals.

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.

The evidence base used to inform the judgements made included: scrutiny of school documentation, observation of three lessons, lunch in the dining room with senior prefects and interviews with yourself, staff in charge of school meal provision, curriculum managers, catering staff and Year 10 pupils.

I undertook to provide a brief written version of the main points made in my feedback at the end of the visit, to support development in healthier eating and school meals.

The overall effectiveness of school meal provision is good.

- The standard of school meals

This is good. All the food served in school meets the new standards. Food is attractively presented with a good range and choice. The meals are produced on site and most of the produce is sourced locally. The food served is tasty and nutritious. The catering team are well trained and take time to encourage pupils to try new foods. However, the take-up of school

meals has gone down. The school believe this is because pupils are getting used to the new, healthier options but the pupils say it is also because of the long queues.

- The quality of the dining experience

Given the circumstances, this is satisfactory. At present most of the school is housed in temporary buildings. Although the dining hall is large, it is not big enough to accommodate all the pupils who want lunch at one sitting. This results in unacceptable levels of noise and too much queuing. The length of the lunch break is sufficient for pupils to eat their food properly and they are able to sit with friends who bring packed lunches. Menus and prices are displayed prominently, along with protocols for behaviour in the dining room. There are no displays about healthy eating.

- Helping pupils and parents to make healthier choices

This aspect is good. The school is part of the National Healthy Schools Programme and is very much aware of its role in promoting healthier eating habits. This is having a positive impact. A Year 10 pupil commented that "the dinner ladies cook well and try hard to make us eat healthily. I now try to eat healthy food all the time". The school has provided some advice to parents through the school newsletter but many pupils still bring crisps and fizzy drinks with their packed lunches. The school nurse's expertise is used effectively to teach about eating disorders within the PSHE programme.

- Developing pupils' knowledge and personal skills

This aspect is satisfactory. Through their work in a range of subjects, pupils develop good knowledge and understanding about balanced diets and healthy eating. They have opportunities to apply their knowledge in choosing recipes and ingredients in food technology and in planning menus in health and social care. However, they are not able to follow basic hygiene rules because toilet facilities are inadequate. Many pupils drop litter around the site and the school has to pay for this to be removed.

- Teaching about healthier eating

This is satisfactory. Teachers strive to make lessons interesting and imaginative. This was especially the case in health and social care where a computer programme on supermarket shopping was used to demonstrate how diet could be improved. However, in the food technology lessons seen, there were some health and safety issues and pupils were noisy and restless. This was not entirely the result of the cramped and hot working conditions. Food handling is taught soundly but skill levels are low. One Year 10 pupil was unable to use a can opener.

- Planning the curriculum

This aspect is good. Across subjects there are well thought-through schemes of work in place which include an emphasis on healthy eating. The draft food policy recognises the need for an audit of subjects delivering aspects relating to food and includes many innovative improvements to be made when the school moves into its new buildings in 2007.

- Managing the school's approach to healthier eating

This aspect is good. Staff responsible for school meals and the catering team do an excellent job in very difficult circumstances. Take-up and quality of school meals are monitored but not enough has been done to sort out the problems in the dining room.

Areas for improvement which we discussed included:

- improving the quantity and condition of the toilets
- taking action to alleviate the over-crowding in the dining room.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop healthier eating and school meals 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

Margaret Jones
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools