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Mr Gilbert  
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Dear Mr Gilbert

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

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 11 December 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: interviews with yourself, staff in charge of school meal provision, curriculum leaders and catering staff and Year 10 students; scrutiny of school documentation; observation of three lessons; and lunch in the dining room with school council members.

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 satisfactory.

- The standard of school meals is satisfactory

The food served in school meets the new standards. The meals are produced on site. The food is nutritious and chips are only served once a week. 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 and portion sizes are small. The contract for school meals is presently out to tender.

- The quality of the dining experience

This is inadequate. The dining room itself is a large, new attractive building but it is not big enough or efficiently organised to accommodate all the students who want lunch at one sitting. This, combined with the pay as you go system, results in unacceptable levels of noise and too much queuing. The length of the lunch break is sufficient for students to eat their food properly and they are able to sit with friends bringing packed lunches. Menus and prices are not displayed prominently enough. There are no displays about healthy eating.

- Helping students and parents to make healthier choices

This aspect is satisfactory. The school is part of the National Healthy School Programme (NHSP) and is becoming more aware of its role in promoting healthier eating habits. Students have good opportunities to learn about healthy choices in a variety of subjects. They put this into practice in food technology lessons and in Year 9 on the special health day where they work with a dietician. No advice has been provided for parents about healthy diet or healthier packed lunches.

- Developing students' knowledge and personal skills

This aspect is satisfactory. Students develop sound knowledge and understanding about balanced diets and healthy eating through a range of subjects. 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, although they know the five fruit and vegetable message and which foods should be restricted, most students cannot explain why this is important. Members of the school council have played an important part in drawing up the specification for the tender for the new school meals contract.

- Teaching about healthier eating

This is good. Teachers strive to make lessons interesting and imaginative, especially in food technology and catering GCSE where food handling is taught well. The system for teaching Person, Social and Health Education (PSHE) has recently been changed from tutors to a discrete team and schemes of work and lesson plans are not yet fully in place. Effective use is made of outside agencies to support learning in school.

- Planning the curriculum

This is satisfactory. The PSHE and healthy lifestyles aspects of the curriculum are in a process of transition. Healthy lifestyles, including mental health issues and eating disorders, are covered, but in a fragmented manner and there has been no cross curricular mapping of provision. A draft food policy has been drawn up but is in its early stages of implementation.

- Managing the school's approach to healthier eating is satisfactory

There is no single person with specific responsibility for school food but an assistant headteacher has oversight of PSHE and NHSP. Take-up and quality of school meals are monitored, but not enough has been done to sort out the problems in the dining room. The school has identified that 30% of students do not eat breakfast and has responded to this by introducing a breakfast club and providing healthy snacks at break-time.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- taking action to alleviate the queuing in the dining room
- setting up a NHS group, representing all stakeholders, to pull together different aspects of healthier eating
- writing schemes of work for PSHE to ensure coverage, balance and progression.

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