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Mr D Ainsworth
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Ainsworth

Ofsted 2009-10 survey inspection programme: healthy eating in schools

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff, students and parents, during my visit with my colleagues from the School Food Trust on 12 November 2009 to look at your work on healthier eating and school food provision.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified within the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff, students and parents; scrutiny of school documentation including the school self-evaluation form; and observation of a food studies lesson, breakfast club and break and lunchtime activities.

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

The quality of provision to promote healthy eating

The quality of provision to promote healthy eating is inadequate.

Compliance with the Department for Children, Schools and Families' (DCSF's) food-based and nutrient-based standards for school food

Compliance with the DCSF's food-based and nutrient-based standards for school food is inadequate.

- The school has purchased a nutrient-analysis package but it has not yet been used, neither have menus been analysed to assess compliance with the nutrient-based standards.
- There were six minor non-compliance issues for food-based standards for school lunches.

The quality of the dining experience

The quality of the dining experience is inadequate.

- Students report that the queues for lunch, though improved, are off-putting; popular foods often run out and there is limited variety. The main dining area does not foster a positive dining experience; it is noisy, there are fixed tables and chairs, paper plates, plastic cutlery and it is sometimes difficult to find a place to sit. Few staff eat meals with the students. Some students choose to eat in the second dining area which does not provide hot lunches but is quieter.
- The school provides free fruit and salad but this information is not prominently displayed and few students take advantage of the offer. Vegetarian meals are included at every serving. Prepared foods, such as sandwiches, are not labelled for ingredients, including potentially allergenic content.
- There is no access to hot water in the students' toilets and some bring their own hand sanitiser to ensure hand hygiene before eating.
- The school uses a cashless system which ensures that those entitled to a free school meal cannot be identified by their peers.

Helping students and parents to make healthier choices

Strategies for helping students and parents to make healthier choices are satisfactory.

- Parents are informed of changes to the catering arrangements through the school newsletter but they are not engaged in consultation regarding the school food policy. No advice is given to parents on the nutritional content of packed lunches. As part of the bid for Healthy School status, the school is planning to consult parents in the future.
- Students understand the importance of the need to drink plenty of water. There is a drinks vending machine in the school which offers healthy options and there are two cool-water dispensers.
- To prevent students from accessing local food outlets, they are not allowed off-site during the day.

Development of students' knowledge and personal skills

The development of students' knowledge and personal skills is satisfactory.

- Students understand about making healthy choices and have many good ideas about how the school could further promote healthy eating.
- Students have not been involved in contributing to evaluations of provision although the school has plans to do this in the future.
- In personal, social, health and economic education lessons, students learn about wider health-related issues, such as the role of the media, body image and eating disorders.

Teaching about healthier eating

Teaching about healthier eating is satisfactory.

- Students develop their knowledge of healthy eating through a range of subjects, including food studies, health and social care, science and physical education.
- In Year 7 food studies lessons, students are encouraged to try new foods in tasting sessions; they compare shop-bought and home-made foods and there are increased opportunities for them to cook using fresh ingredients.
- There is an after-school cooking club which accommodates 10 students.

Planning the curriculum

Planning the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Food and nutrition are taught across a number of subjects and students develop a sound understanding of the importance of making healthy choices. Systematic curriculum planning is at an early stage, including the monitoring of provision to ensure continuity from subject to subject.
- There is no specific support from health professionals when planning or teaching about healthy eating.
- There are healthy-eating displays in classrooms and in the dining area but these sometimes present confusing and inaccurate messages.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are inadequate.

- The school does not comply with the DCSF's food-based and nutrient-based standards for school food.
- The school has not consulted or worked closely with students, parents and carers in the development of their school food policy, and there is insufficient guidance provided on the nutritional value of food brought from home.
- Minutes of the governing body indicate that little discussion has taken place with regard to catering and the requirements of the DCSF's standards.

- The school has been successful in increasing the percentage of students taking school meals who are entitled to a free lunch. However, it does not monitor the take-up and types of meals eaten by other groups of students, including the more vulnerable, those with eating disorders or allergies or from different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include the need to:

- comply with the DCSF's food-based and nutrient-based standards for school food
- consult with students, parents and carers on the development of the school's healthy-eating policy
- improve continuity and progression across subjects to ensure consistent messages are taught and built upon
- monitor the take-up and types of meals eaten by the more vulnerable students, those with eating disorders or allergies or from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, to better meet their needs.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop healthier eating and provision for food in the school.

As I explained during the feedback, this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Janet Palmer
Her Majesty's Inspector