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Mr R McCowan
Headteacher
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Dear Mr McCowan

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 colleague from the School Food Trust on 2 December 2009 to look at your work on healthier eating and school food provision.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified within the main text.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with nominated staff, a group of parents and two groups of students; scrutiny of school documentation; observation of a catering lesson; and observation of the school's before-school, break time and lunchtime food provision.

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 good.

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 good.

- The menu cycle and observation of the school's provision demonstrated that the majority of the food-based standards were met. Fruit and vegetables were available and students were encouraged to include them in their meal. The standard for meat products was not met, as burgers are available more frequently than once each fortnight during the menu cycle. The majority of the drinks provided are compliant with the standards, but flavoured water not compliant with the standards was available at lunchtime and across the school day.

The quality of the dining experience

The quality of the dining experience is outstanding.

- The Express Café is a light, bright and attractive area. It has the appearance of a café and not a school dining room. There is a range of seating and a variety of food outlets. This ensures that, although there is some queuing, students are served promptly. The time allocated for the mid-day meal is appropriate
- All students can use the café. Students can sit with their friends in large groups or at smaller tables. The school promotes mealtimes as a social occasion. Staff are encouraged to go to the café for coffee at break times or for lunch. This promotes good relationships between staff and students and ensures that any vulnerable students are supported. Students talk during lunch and linger when the meal is over. Behaviour is very good.
- Information about the food on offer is displayed on television screens, menu cards and blackboards in the café. Students and staff are encouraged to taste unfamiliar dishes and thus broaden their food choices. Sixth formers can eat at any time and they can also collect healthy 'take out' lunches to eat in their common room.

Helping students and parents to make healthier choices

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

- Students receive good information about the variety of meals available. Students with particular dietary requirements or those that are most vulnerable are supported very well. There is an exceptionally good range of healthy food available which should suit all tastes.
- The Express Café is welcoming and Year 7 students said they felt confident when using it.
- Some information on food provision is available to parents on the school's website or in newsletters. Parental views are not yet taken into account, although the school has plans to do so. Students are given guidance about the food and drinks which can be brought into school. Most students are clear about what is acceptable, but some lunchboxes do not reflect the school's guidance. The school does not have a food policy so it cannot hold parents or students to account.

Development of students' knowledge and personal skills

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

- In discussions, students demonstrated a very good understanding of healthy eating. The school ensures that it links teaching about healthy eating to other health-promoting activities.
- The catering course provides students with very good opportunities to plan and cook healthy meals.

Teaching about healthier eating

Teaching about healthier eating is good.

- Students understand which foods contribute to a healthy lifestyle. The school's food provision ensures that students can apply this knowledge in their everyday lives.
- Students taking GCSE catering courses are encouraged to acquire a food hygiene certificate. Most students gain this qualification.

Planning the curriculum

Planning the curriculum is outstanding.

- Teaching about healthy eating is integrated exceptionally well into all aspects of the school's work.
- There are very thorough schemes of work which identify cross-curricular themes. These identify previous learning and provide planned opportunities to assess students' knowledge, understanding and skills and eradicate misunderstandings. There are differentiated activities for the most able students and for those who need additional support. Students work on practical investigations and make choices and decisions. They have good opportunities to assess their own diet.
- Healthy eating is a particular focus in all subjects and the school encourages healthy eating for sport. Staff and students recognise that teaching and learning are supported very effectively by the range and quality of the food provided in school.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- Your strong and visionary leadership, and that of your senior staff, ensure that the school promotes healthy eating exceptionally well. The school has sought out best practice and has entered into an effective partnership with another school. It employs skilled and experienced staff. This has a very positive impact on the school's provision and on students' personal development and well-being.

- The healthy school coordinator is experienced and influential. He has a very secure understanding of the provision in different subjects and of the impact this work has on students and staff. He is supported well by subject departments.
- The school is aware that it needs to formalise its provision for healthy eating within a formal food policy which can be shared with parents and students. Although the school promotes healthy eating well and students understand the school's requirements, the school cannot ensure that the contents of packed lunches conform to its expectations.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- writing a food policy
- ensuring that packed lunches conform to the school's expectations.

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, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Christine Graham
Her Majesty's Inspector