

Providing Meals in Essex Primary Schools

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East Anglia Food Link
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Introduction

This booklet is primarily intended to help everyone involved in the provision of school meals at primary schools in Essex - including **catering staff, headteachers, governors, and administrators**. Much of the information may be of use and interest to other schools in Essex and beyond.

The aim is to help those concerned to **understand the options** for school catering and to set about **putting in place** the one that will bring the greatest benefits to the school, not least by offering the best possible meals to pupils.

Schools may have reservations about setting up their own **in-house catering service**. Many feel that this option can bring the greatest benefits. Much of the advice in this booklet is aimed at schools considering this option.

A *Directory of Suppliers, Services and Support* accompanies this booklet listing some of the suppliers, service providers and sources of support available to schools in Essex.

In At The Deep End

The sudden ending of a centrally contracted school meals service for primaries in Essex has forced schools to react quickly in order to meet their obligation to provide free school meals to entitled pupils and paid meals on request.

The need for an **immediate response** put schools under considerable pressure. Many have signed up with private contractors (often for just one further year) to provide hot meals, while others are providing sandwiches and some have chosen to take their catering in-house.

In the longer term there is a **real opportunity** for schools to reassess their provision of meals and find the best approach for their circumstances, often through taking the catering service in-house. The food served to children can be improved, mealtimes made more enjoyable for all and a connection made with the health and nutrition components of the curriculum.

Why Do School Meals Matter?

Everyone needs a **healthy diet**, but for children it is especially important. Eating healthily improves the short-term health of children, allows them to grow and develop properly, and helps to avoid chronic disease later in life. It can also help improve children's concentration, achievement and behaviour.

Health and nutrition are an important part of the national curriculum. There is increasing recognition of the importance of healthy eating to public health and children must be educated so they can make informed healthy eating choices now and in the future. Sadly, the lessons of the classroom and the meals provided in school often carry contradictory messages.

Meals are **socially important** and food is part of our **cultural heritage**. Learning to eat communally will help children to play a responsible and valuable role in society later in life. Developing an appreciation of food and its simple pleasures can greatly improve one's quality and enjoyment of life.

A Real Opportunity for Improvement

The task of taking catering in-house can seem daunting. However, the steps are in fact straightforward and many schools have already gone through the process with little difficulty. Indeed, they've found great benefits from doing so. The case studies at the end of this booklet illustrate this.

"Going in-house was easier than finding a new contractor"
- Essex secondary school catering manager

Establishing **in-house catering** gives a school great flexibility and freedom. Besides the opportunity to improve meals and the dining experience, schools can use their catering service for other events (eg PTA meetings, fundraising etc) and even derive additional income from a successful meal service.

The **job satisfaction** of catering staff can be improved by making them feel a valued part of the school. Giving more responsibility and control to the catering staff, and particularly the catering manager (or head cook), can greatly increase their enthusiasm and commitment to their work. Many schools have been able to increase the wages of catering staff.

Wider benefits include improving the environmental impact of school catering (eg through reduction of food miles) and assisting the local economy.

East Anglia Food Link

East Anglia Food Link is a not-for-profit co-operative organisation working towards **greater sustainability** across the entire food chain, from production to consumption. We were founded in 1997 and have been concerned with public sector catering for many years, believing that there is both a need and opportunity for improvements in the quality of meals and sustainable sourcing of ingredients.

We have recently been awarded funding from the **Esmée Fairbairn Foundation** to work on public sector catering across the East of England. With additional support from **Government Office for the East of England**, we have run two seminars for schools in Essex and are producing these booklets to help schools assess their options for provision of meals and set about putting the best system in place.

A Whole School Approach

By adopting a *whole school approach* and bringing together the theory of the classroom and the practice of the school kitchen, healthy eating can be encouraged most effectively. Treating meals as part of the school day, rather than an isolated refuelling operation, helps to develop healthy, social and enjoyable attitudes to eating.

Improving the quality of meals and the dining experience for children can have a **positive effect across the school day**. Eating healthily in school can also improve children's concentration, bringing higher levels of achievement and better behaviour. The social skills developed in eating well and communally can help improve behaviour and the wider school culture.

The **National Curriculum** (Key Stage 2) states that "Pupils should be taught ... about the need for food for activity and growth and about the importance of an adequate and varied diet for health". If this lesson is to be properly taught, it must be reinforced by the school's own practice.

The **British Nutrition Foundation** has published an excellent booklet on putting in place a whole school approach, available through their website, www.nutrition.org.uk.

Sources of Support

Healthy Schools

The Essex and Southend Healthy Schools Partnership supports a whole school approach to health in schools, which underpins pupil achievement, helps to tackle health inequalities and promotes social inclusion.

The scheme provides a framework within which pupils, staff, parents, governors and other agencies can work together on health priorities, including the promotion of healthier eating. It highlights the importance of learning about food and nutrition through the curriculum and developing positive and healthy attitudes towards food through provision in school, for example breakfast clubs, cooking in school, snacks and school meals.

For further information and local contacts please visit the website, www.essexandsouthendhealthyschools.com.

Essex County Council

The council's **Procurement Services** department offers a package of support and advice to schools. Services offered include:

- Procurement consultant, helpline support and monitoring
- Craft skills training, presentation & customer care
- Advice on risk assessment and HACCP
- Advice on maintenance, purchasing equipment, local sourcing
- Advice on legislative issues, budgetary issues and recruitment
- Advice on basic food hygiene & other legislative training
- Facilitation of meal arrangements between supplying kitchen & serveries
- Access to a secure website providing nutritionally balanced menus, full recipe information, promotional material and supply of food and sundries.

The **Schools Support Team** in the council's **Financial Services** department offers a finance support service, which many schools already buy into. This service will help “set up your finance structure and ... with the preparation of year end trading accounts” in relation to catering.

The council's **Personnel Service** will support schools with personnel issues relating to catering.

Providing Meals – The Alternatives

There are a number of ways that schools can meet their obligation to provide meals, depending on their circumstances.

Schools with kitchens have the following options:

- **Running their own in-house catering service** - providing either hot and cold meals or sandwiches
- **Buying in a service from a contractor**, either a private company, neighbouring local authority caterer or nearby school - either for hot and cold meals or sandwiches only

Schools without kitchens are clearly more restricted in their options:

- **Buying in meals from a nearby school** (which may be running in-house catering or using a contractor)
- **Buying in a sandwich-only service from a contractor**
- **Relying on children to bring their own packed lunches** (although provision must be made if any pupils are entitled to free school meals or if any pupils request a paid-for meal)

Whilst it is possible to meet the nutritional requirements with a sandwich-only service, as long as there is sufficient variety in the fillings, there is far greater potential to give children an enjoyable and nutritious lunch through provision of hot meals.

Many schools have found that the best way to offer an improved meal service is through taking the catering service in-house.

Schools using contract caterers should not lose sight of the influence they can bring to bear on the service they receive. If contract caterers are kept informed of the needs, wishes and issues of concern of schools, they are more likely to meet them.

Statutory Requirements

Meals must be made available in schools and must meet minimum nutritional standards. Additional requirements, for example of health and safety, apply to all caterers and employers.

Schools' Duty to Provide Nutritious Meals

Provision of meals

Governing bodies are required by law to provide meals to pupils within the school, specifically:

- **Free school meals** to pupils entitled to receive them (ie those whose parents are receiving certain benefits)
- **Paid school meals** to other pupils on request

For some years, funding for school meals has been delegated to all secondary schools, with other schools able to opt for delegated funding by choice. In Essex, funding has now been delegated to all schools. Delegation of the budget transfers the obligation to provide free and requested meals from the LEA to the school's governing body.

Governing bodies have a responsibility to decide on the content and cost of meals, and to ensure that they comply with the minimum nutritional requirements.

Nutritional Requirements

In April 2001, new nutritional standards were introduced for school meals, the first since the duty to provide a midday meal "suitable in all respects as the main meal of the day" was abolished over 20 years ago.

The standards are based around **food types** rather than nutritional content and are easily understood and enforced. The requirements are set out on the following page.

Guidance on meeting the standards is available on the DfES website, at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/schoollunches/default.shtml>

Minimum Nutritional Standards

Food is divided into five groups:

- A. Fruit and Vegetables.** Fruit and vegetables (except those in group B) in all forms.
- B. Starchy Foods.** Including bread, potatoes, pasta, noodles, rice, chapattis, yams, millet and cornmeal.
- C. Meat, fish and other non-dairy protein.** All meat, fish, eggs, nuts, pulses and beans (except green beans).
- D. Milk and dairy foods.** Including milk, cheese, yoghurt (including frozen and drinking), fromage frais, milkshakes and custard, but **NOT** butter and cream.
- E. Food containing fat and/or sugar.** Including margarine, butter, other spreading fats, cooking oils and fats, oil-based salad dressing, mayonnaise, salad cream, cream, chocolate, crisps, biscuits, pastries, cakes, puddings, ice cream, rich sauces, gravies, jam, sugary soft drinks, sweets, sugar and jelly, but **NOT** foods falling into any other group.

In primary schools and in nursery units within primary schools, the **principal requirement** is as follows:

- Food from each of **groups A, B, C, and D** should be available each day.

The following **additional requirements** are demanded in primary schools:

A. Within group A:

- A vegetable (not falling into group B) AND a fruit (fresh, tinned in juice or fruit salad) must be available every day
- A fruit-based dessert must be available twice a week

B. Within group B:

- Fat or oil should not be used in the cooking process on more than three days in any week

C. Within group C:

- Fish shall be available at least one day a week
- Red meat shall be available at least two days a week
- In primary schools, group C can include dairy sources of protein

Further Requirements

There are a number of statutory requirements for school catering system. If you're using a contractor, some requirements, such as food safety, are strictly their responsibility whilst others, such as equipment maintenance, remain with the school. In any case, you may feel that further checks are desirable.

Hygiene and Food Safety

Good hygiene and food safety practice is essential for all caterers, in order to avoid cases of food poisoning and to remain within the law.

All caterers must demonstrate *due diligence* in the sourcing, preparation and serving of food. To meet this requirement:

- **Proper procedures** (including risk assessment and hazard analysis) should be in place covering all aspects of food handling (drawn up by a consultant or staff member with suitable qualifications, such as an Advanced Certificate in Food Safety).
- Staff should have **adequate training** in food hygiene and safety.

The requirements of the law are outlined on the following page, but all caterers are **strongly advised** to seek further advice from their environmental health officer, the Food Standards Agency's publications and other sources such as specialist consultants.

Environmental Health Officers (EHOs)

EHOs are an invaluable **first source** of advice on all aspects of food safety. Your kitchen, like all catering establishments, should already be **registered** with the local authority's Environmental Health department.

"Adopt an environmental health officer"
- former head of primary school running in-house catering

It is well worth developing a close and good relationship with your EHO. The EHO must inspect your premises by law and will give you further advice on what you should do to ensure that your premises, practices and staff meet the requirements for producing safe food. You can also ask about your chosen suppliers. EHOs can take action if standards are unsatisfactory.

EHOs can be contacted through local authorities. Contact details are included in the *Directory of Suppliers, Services and Support*.

Food Safety in Catering - The Law in Brief

There are four key laws relating to food safety in catering. An outline of their requirements is given below, but greater detail can be found in the FSA's *Food Safety Regulations* publication.

1. **The Food Safety Act (1990)** : Requires *due diligence*, ie that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure good food hygiene. In particular:
 - Food that is unfit for people to eat must not be sold or kept for sale
 - Food must not be caused to be dangerous to health
 - The content and quality of food must be as the customer is entitled to expect
 - Food must not be described or presented in a false or misleading way
 2. **Food Premises (Registration) Regulations (1991)**
 - All food businesses must be registered with the local environmental health department, at least 28 days before opening
 3. **Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations (1995)** : Sets out the minimum hygiene principles that must be followed in relation to food safety procedures, food handling, premises, staff and training.
 - Food safety controls must be in place to ensure that food is produced safely and with no risk to health
 4. **Food Safety (Temperature Control) Regulations (1995)** : Covers the need for good temperature control that is essential to food safety
 - Temperatures at which food must be kept
 - Stages of food supply chain where temperature must be controlled
 - Which foods are exempt and where there is flexibility
-

Seeking Further Advice

Consultancy

Specialist consultants can go further than EHOs in providing assistance to school kitchens, helping, for example, to draw up the necessary hygiene procedures. Contact details for a number of consultants are included in the *Directory of Suppliers, Services and Support*.

Government Publications

The **Food Standards Agency (FSA)** publishes some excellent booklets with clear advice on complying with the law on food safety and avoiding problems.

The booklets of most relevance to schools are:

- *Starting Up: your first steps to running a catering business*
- *Guide to Food Hygiene*
- *Food Safety: a practical guide for managers*
- *Food Safety Regulations*
- *Food Law Inspections and Your Business*

The first three can be downloaded from the FSA website -

www.food.gov.uk/cleanup - and all are available free of charge from the FSA (tel 0845 606 0667, e-mail foodstandards@eclogistics.co.uk).

Other Publications

Chadwick House publishes the *Industry guide to good hygiene practice: The Catering Guide*, giving advice on compliance with food safety regulations. The guide is recommended by the FSA. It costs £3.60 and can be ordered online at www.shop.cieh.net or by calling 020 7827 5830.

A number of other publications are produced privately and are available through catering suppliers, bookshops and libraries. Highfield publishes a popular range, see www.highfield.co.uk.

Websites

The FSA's website - www.food.gov.uk/cleanup - has plenty of advice for caterers and about food in general.

Most district councils publish basic factsheets on food safety. Web addresses for all councils in Essex can be found in the *Directory of Suppliers, Services and Support*.

Training Staff

To ensure that *due diligence* is exercised, all catering staff should be adequately trained, at the very least in basic food hygiene. If possible, the Catering Manager should be qualified to intermediate level or above.

The **Chartered Institute of Environmental Health** (CIEH) and the **Royal Institute for Public Health** (RIPH) both issue qualifications in food safety and accredit trainers. Details of trainers are given in the *Directory of Suppliers, Services and Support*, many offering on-site training.

Recognised Food Safety Courses

Level 1 courses

- Foundation Certificate in Food Hygiene (formerly Basic Food Hygiene)
- Foundation Certificate in Food Hygiene Update

Level 2 courses

- Intermediate Certificate in Food Safety

Level 3 courses

- Advanced Certificate in Food Safety

Further courses cover hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP).

All staff should take the **Foundation Certificate in Food Hygiene**, which generally costs £30-45, lasts around 6 hours and covers:

- Food poisoning and bacteriology
- Prevention of contamination and food poisoning
- Personal hygiene, cleaning and disinfection
- Legislation, premises, equipment and pest control

The **Intermediate Certificate in Food Safety** is more substantial, costing £250-400 and lasting 4 days. It is aimed at those in a supervisory role and is recommended for all catering managers, allowing those that qualify to:

- Play an active part in monitoring food hygiene standards
- Be involved in training activities, especially on the job training
- Effectively supervise food handlers on hygiene issues
- Carry out hygiene audits, assist in hazard analysis programmes
- Encourage good standards of personal hygiene
- Help in the formulation and writing of hygiene policies, instructions etc.

Advanced training takes around 6 days and enables those who qualify to train others to basic level and to implement food safety procedures.

Employment

All catering staff must be employed in accordance with the law, regarding rights and obligations, the minimum wage, and contractual obligations. Employment arrangements will be made in a similar way to your other staff. Any existing catering staff will normally have the right to continued employment with the school.

Procurement

Proper procurement procedures must be followed in the purchasing of supplies and services, as set out in *Procurement Standards for Schools*. If in doubt, refer to Essex County Council's Procurement Services department.

Health and Safety

The school catering system must meet the requirements of **health and safety at work** that apply to all employers, aside from the specific requirements for food safety outlined above.

It is the **employer's duty** to protect the health, safety and welfare of all employees, and other people who might be affected by what they do. Every employer must do whatever is reasonably practicable to achieve this. This means ensuring that employees are protected from anything that may cause harm, and by controlling the risks that work will cause injury or ill health.

Employees must be **informed about the risks** in the workplace and how they are protected. Where necessary, employees must be **instructed** and **trained** on how to deal with the risks. The employer is also obliged to consult employees on health and safety issues where appropriate.

Kitchens can be **dangerous places** so special attention must be paid to the health and safety of catering staff. For example, appliances must be regularly and thoroughly checked by a **properly qualified person**. Anyone maintaining gas appliances **must** be CORGI registered.

Further advice on health and safety at work, including a booklet for employers, is available from the **Health and Safety Executive** at www.hse.gov.uk.

Practicalities

Staffing and Personnel

Allocation of Responsibilities

It is essential to have a **clear and realistic division** of responsibilities in any school catering system. This will be partly determined by the experience and enthusiasm of those involved, but commitment to making it work is required from the headteacher, governors and caterers. Typical ways of dividing responsibilities are given on the next page.

It is sensible for the catering manager to take on day-to-day responsibility for the school's catering operation, while the Head takes on more general but less immediate responsibility for overseeing the running of the system. Too much day-to-day involvement from the Head can lead to him or her feeling overstretched and the catering staff feeling a lack of responsibility.

It's a good idea to have a nominated governor with responsibility for overseeing the school's catering and wider issues of food in the school.

Workload and Staffing

There will inevitably be some extra work involved, especially during the first few months, but this should be more than outweighed by the benefits and additional income from increased sales. Additional time and duties can often be provided from within the existing staff.

Although contract caterers often have difficulty recruiting and keeping catering staff, independent school meal services generally find it easier. Many schools have found that catering staff can be recruited from amongst the parents of pupils or the local community.

Independent catering often presents opportunities to improve the pay and conditions of catering staff, bringing them into line with other school staff and breaking down any perceived division. Better conditions and increased responsibility bring greater job satisfaction and commitment. Working directly for the school is felt to be a worthwhile contribution as well as a job.

Provision must be made for cover when a member of staff is away. Training the midday assistants in basic food hygiene will allow them to help in the kitchen when necessary. Alternatively, a parent may be lined up to be called on in times of need, or a cluster can arrange or share cover between schools.

Typical Division of Responsibilities for School Catering

Head Teacher

- Takes overall responsibility for management within wider management of school, leaving daily practical matters to the catering manager
- Approves menus, perhaps on termly basis
- Occasional checks of kitchen operations
- Ensures that risk assessment and hazard analysis is carried out
- Draws up annual catering budget within general school budget

Catering Manager / Head Cook

- Responsible for food budget, ordering and purchasing food, stock rotation, menu design and other practical matters
- Day to day management of other catering staff
- Should preferably take the intermediate course in food hygiene

Other Catering Staff

- Preparation and serving of food (may require training in real cooking)
- Should have basic qualification in food hygiene
- May be trained to cover role of Catering Manager when necessary

School Office

- Responsible for staff contracts and salaries, organising maintenance of kitchen equipment, processing food orders, collecting dinner money

School Caretaker / Other Support Staff

- May take on pest control and high-level cleaning duties (adequate training and qualifications are required)

Consortium Finance Manager (if applicable)

- Annual preparation of catering budget

Essex County Council

- May provide payroll and personnel services, as for other staff
- Procurement services offer support (see page 6)

Governors

- Ultimately responsible for meeting statutory requirements
- Nominated governor, or sub-committee, may take responsibility for overseeing school catering and wider issues of food in the school

Joint roles

- Devising school nutrition policy and ensuring whole school approach

Involving Everyone

For any school meal system to work successfully, everyone involved must feel that the system is meeting and responding to their needs. This is part of the **whole school approach** which brings the greatest benefits from improved school catering. For pupils and parents, it is especially important that they understand what's on offer and how it's changed.

Pupils

- May be invited to voice their wishes, suggesting menu options, naming catering service etc

Parents

- Should be kept informed of the changes and canvassed for their views – on what they'd like their children to eat etc

Teachers

- Should be informed of the changes and encouraged to link teaching on healthy eating with the healthier food available. Better still if teachers are convinced of the quality of school lunches and join the pupils to eat

The Wider Community

- Many successful school meal systems involve the wider community, for example by inviting the elderly to join the children once a week. If your school doesn't do this you might investigate the level of interest

Clustering

Many schools already work in clusters to share resources and information in certain areas. Clustering can help schools in the smooth running of independent catering systems.

- **Working with Suppliers:** By sourcing as a cluster, schools can improve their buying power, helping to meet minimum order levels, arrange more frequent deliveries, negotiate lower prices etc
 - **Staffing:** Clusters can work together to provide and share cover when required. Particular responsibilities, such as high-level cleaning or drawing up the annual budget, may be carried out by a single person across the cluster.
 - **Training:** One member of staff might be trained to advanced level in order to provide basic food hygiene training and implementation of food safety procedures across the cluster.
-

Budgeting

Income

Income for a catering service comes both through the income from sold meals and from the county council's subsidy and allowance for free school meals.

The Delegated Budget

Schools receive an element of their delegated budget to go towards provision of meals, comprising a basic amount determined by the size of the school and a variable amount determined by the number of free and paid-for school meals provided. Essex County Council provides extra funding where schools face particular difficulties.

Income from Meals Sold

Schools are free to set the price of paid-for meals, but any increase to cover additional expenditure should be kept to a minimum so as not to discourage take-up. Remember that any increase in uptake of meals will increase income, helping to cover fixed costs and allowing increased spending on ingredients, staff etc.

Collecting Money

Most schools have been responsible for collecting money for lunches under contract catering, so often little change is necessary.

Approaches vary, but encouraging parents to pay for an entire month or term of meals in one go greatly reduces administration. However, any system should also provide for parents who find it difficult to make large and infrequent payments.

Parents and pupils often appreciate the flexibility of being able to choose whether to take a meal on a daily basis. This choice can be made in advance if menus are circulated to parents, but allowing for impulse purchases of meals gives parents and pupils further welcome flexibility.

Selling books of vouchers is one way of minimising administration while maintaining choice. In addition, vouchers can help avoid the stigma sometimes felt by children taking free school meals.

Outgoings

The items of expenditure of a school catering system will be:

- **Food purchases**
- **Staff salaries**
- **Utilities** (as contribution to school's wider costs)
- **Service contracts** (pest control, high-level cleaning, maintenance)
- **Occasional expenditure** (eg staff training, purchase of new crockery)
- **Exceptional expenditure** (eg renewal of heavy equipment)

Experience has shown that adequate budgeting and accounting systems can be made simple and easy to operate. Unnecessary complication often results in unproductive systems.

Sensible allowances can be set to cover a share of the school's utility bills and to purchase ingredients. Larger items of expenditure, such as wages and service contracts, can be accurately budgeted for on an annual basis. Provision must be made for less frequent but necessary and potentially very costly items of expenditure, such as the renewal of heavy equipment.

One school found that an allowance of 5p per meal was adequate to cover the kitchen's share of electricity, gas, water, refuse and telephone costs.

Spending on Food

The opportunity to increase spending on ingredients is a key benefit of independent catering and a clear way to improve the quality of meals. Spending can easily be increased to between 45 and 55 pence, while some schools are spending around 60p per meal on ingredients.

Simply multiplying the number of meals sold each week by the spending allowance per meal will give a weekly budget for the catering manager to spend on food, with any surplus or deficit carried forward to the following week. This has proved an effective, simple and workable system.

Moving from a single supplier to a wider range of more local suppliers can help increase quality, as well as supporting the local economy. A typical school may make three or four orders a week, not placing undue pressure on the school office which will probably be responsible for processing accounts.

Most suppliers will be happy to set up accounts for schools. The exception is supermarkets, which many schools use for general supplies and even fruit and vegetables. Supermarkets can be unco-operative in facilitating accounts but may be persuaded if the school is persistent.

Finding Suppliers

Independent catering brings great opportunities and flexibility for a school to choose its suppliers. Increasing spending on ingredients is one way to improve the quality of meals but shopping around for ingredients is also important.

Contract caterers often use a single supplier for all ingredients. Schools can often find better prices, or better quality and service, by shopping around and using local suppliers.

A number of possible suppliers are listed in the *Directory of Suppliers, Services and Support*.

Local Suppliers

Local suppliers can offer many benefits to schools, and using them greatly benefits the local economy.

- One-to-one relationship encourages **better service**
- Often able to offer **frequent deliveries** as close at hand
- Able to **put right any problems** with orders
- May offer **greater assurances** of quality and origin
- Possibility of organising **school visits**

Ensuring Safety and Quality

All suppliers must be reputable and meet all the necessary food safety requirements. Schools should **never** buy from any supplier that gives them cause for concern. If in doubt, an EHO or the local authority's environmental health department will be able to advise. Butchers, in particular, should be licensed by the local authority, indicating that they have met all the required food safety standards.

Arranging Terms and Agreeing Prices

Negotiate! Many schools have found that they've been able to negotiate good terms and discounts with suppliers. Don't be afraid to shop around. You may find that different suppliers offer significantly different prices and quality of product. It's always worth asking potential suppliers about their products and the service they offer. That way, they'll know what you are looking for and that you care, and be more likely to meet your requirements.

As previously noted, proper procurement procedures must be followed.

Other Service Providers

All caterers must ensure that adequate **pest control, high-level cleaning and equipment maintenance** is carried out.

Pest control and high-level cleaning are essential to ensure food safety. Regular maintenance of equipment and machinery is essential for health and safety in the kitchen. Other checks, such as provision of adequate ventilation, must also be carried out. Repairs will be necessary from time to time.

All these services **must** be carried out by a **properly qualified** person. For maintenance of gas appliances, CORGI registration is essential.

Sometimes, some of these services can be arranged within the school, if a member of staff has the **necessary qualifications** or can be trained. Outside contractors will always keep records of services provided and **detailed records** also must be kept if the service is arranged in-house.

One primary school, which took its catering in-house 2 years ago, sent the caretaker on courses in both pest control and high-level cleaning, so he is now able to provide both services.

Clusters of schools can share staff to carry out these specialist jobs. In other cases it will be necessary to buy these services in from contractors.

Menu Design

A Healthy Diet

A healthy diet is especially important for children's short-term health, growth and development, and concentration, behaviour and achievement levels. Experience has shown that children will respond well to healthier meals, more real cooking and use of unprocessed ingredients, so long as the change is explained to them and isn't rushed.

Whole School Approach

To reap the greatest rewards from improved school catering, a ***whole school approach*** must be taken. Encouraging children to enjoy healthier food takes time. Simply imposing a changed menu will often fail as the children won't understand why their food has changed and may not even recognise the food.

It's important to take things slowly and to work with teachers to introduce pupils to healthy eating and different foods. Equally, messages about healthy eating in the classroom will have little impact if the meals served up at lunchtime carry a contradictory message.

Parents and children should be kept informed about the changes and invited to make their views and wishes known. If they feel involved, they're more likely to take part in the school meal service and to enjoy the food.

Nutritional Requirements

The Basic Requirements

Basic nutritional standards are required by law and are set out under *Statutory Requirements* on page 8 above. As the requirements are based on food types, it's very straightforward to ensure that any menu meets them.

Aiming Higher

In 1992, the Caroline Walker Trust published *Nutritional Guidelines for School Meals*, a respected source of advice on achieving high nutritional standards in school meals.

The guidelines include recommendations that school lunches should provide 30% of a child's energy requirements, with not more than 35% of food energy coming from fat, not more than 11% from saturated fatty acids and not more than 11% from non-milk extrinsic sugars (ie added sugars).

Further details are available at www.dfes.gov.uk/schoollunches.

Designing a Menu

A good school menu must meet the needs of the children and be manageable on a daily basis within the capacity of the kitchen, budget, staff skills, available time and supplies.

For a menu to work, the lead role in drawing it up should be taken by the catering manager, who will be responsible for preparing it on a daily basis. It is, however, beneficial to involve a wide range of other parties, from the headteacher to the children themselves.

A good school menu should:

- Provide **healthy food**, reflecting healthy eating messages in the classroom
- Meet the **basic nutritional requirements**
- Provide food that the **children enjoy**
- Meet the **budget** for food expenditure
- Offer **variety and choice**, encouraging a balanced diet
- Be within the kitchen staff's **capacity and ability** to prepare
- Use a **variety of cooking methods**

Excellent advice on devising healthy menus is given in a booklet produced by the Department for Education and Skills, available through their website, www.dfes.gov.uk/schoollunches.

Structuring the Menu

The length of time for which a menu runs and the range of choice will be determined by the preferences of the catering manager, the wishes of the pupils, parents and staff, and the capacity of the kitchen and staff.

Most schools run a rolling menu repeated every 2 to 4 weeks and typically changed every term. This reduces the work required in drawing up the menu and the frequency with which menus need to be circulated to parents. Children often appreciate a degree of predictability.

The daily choice may offer any of the following:

- One or more hot options, including vegetarian
 - Sandwich or baguette option
 - Choice amongst potatoes, rice, pasta, bread
 - Choice of vegetables or salad
 - Dessert choice of cooked pudding, fresh fruit, fruit salad, yoghurt
-

Seasonality

Changing the menu each term will allow the seasonality of ingredients to be reflected in the dishes on offer. Using seasonal ingredients offers the following benefits:

- Seasonal ingredients **cost less**
- Seasonal ingredients are often of **higher quality** and **taste better**
- **Improves understanding** of how and where food is produced
- Helps **reduce food miles**

Keep an Open Mind

It's always worth keeping an open mind about the structure of the menu and the daily choices offered. Feedback from pupils and parents, and ideas from elsewhere, can provide the impetus for change that improves the meals or better meets the capacity of the kitchen and available budget.

The results of change can be unexpected. For example, use of less processed food can result in savings on ingredient expenditure though preparation time may be longer. However, wastage may turn out to be less than expected if the children appreciate the improvement in taste.

Sources of Ideas

Ideas for the menu structure and choice can come from:

- **Other Schools:** visit other schools to see what they're offering. Talk to other school caterers to share ideas and experiences.
- **Websites:** many school caterers (individual schools, local authorities and contract caterers) post menus on their websites. Try putting "school lunches" or "school meals" into a search engine and you'll find numerous links to menus.
- **Feedback from parents and pupils:** parents will inevitably have opinions on the menus offered and have ideas of their own. Children can be encouraged to come up with menu suggestions, through projects or competitions, and will feel more engaged with the meal service.

Costing

As discussed under *Budgeting* above, costing menus is essential but can be made over-complicated. Best to have a simple, but strict, allowance for ingredients per meal provided and to sketch out how this translates into the required ingredients for each menu option.

Encouraging Uptake

Independent school catering services offer the potential for greatly increased uptake of school meals. Not only does this lead to improved cost efficiencies (allowing greater spend on ingredients, increased wages for staff and additional income for the school), it also helps to create a feeling of cohesion amongst pupils and staff. The wider standards of the school can be improved.

Uptake of meals can improve for the following reasons:

- Improved **quality** of food
- Improved dining **experience**
- Parents have **greater trust** in meal service and feel more involved
- Children feel **engaged** with meal service
- Mealtimes perceived as **integral** part of school day

Providing Information

Providing information, both to pupils and parents, is essential to developing interest and involvement in the school meal system. For improvements in quality and service to translate into increased uptake, parents must be aware of them and understand the changes.

Simply by distributing menus at the beginning of each term, pupils and parents are kept more aware of what's on offer and are better able to decide whether to take up the meals offered.

Engaging Pupils and Parents

Pupils and parents must be made to feel engaged. If their views and wishes are reflected and accommodated, they will feel that it is *their* meal service rather than an anonymous service selling food for profit.

Parents might be also be invited to join pupils for lunch, either on an open basis or on particular occasions. This will help build a feeling of community and enable parents to understand what their children are offered to eat each day.

Special Offers

Special offers can be a useful way of stimulating uptake. By offering, for example, 10 meals for the price of 9, interest can be aroused amongst those not taking meals and more consistent uptake can be encouraged.

Special Events

Special events are always popular with children and can increase uptake, most obviously for the event itself but also in the longer term.

Special Days and Traditions

Marking events with appropriate menus also helps to improve children's understanding of what the events mean, how they're traditionally celebrated and how food is integral to our social life. Examples such as Christmas are familiar to all, but dying traditions such as serving Simnel Cake in the middle of Lent can be revived by keeping them alive in the minds of children.

Local traditions, such as the Dunmow Flitch Trials, in which a side of salted pork is awarded to a married couple who haven't argued in the previous year, might be marked, raising awareness of local history and social relationships.

Seasonal Specialities

A special event can be made of seasonal specialities, such as strawberries or asparagus, again helping to foster children's understanding of food and making the mealtime notable. A local producer may even be found to support the event in return for raising his profile amongst the children and their parents.

Going Organic

Organic food can offer greater assurances of health and safety, whilst also bringing greater benefits to the environment through higher standards of production. Many parents would like to see their children eating more organic food and there is considerable demand for more in schools.

However, organic food often costs more than conventionally produced food because of the higher production standards. Conventional food is often artificially cheap as costs (such as treating water contaminated with nitrates and pesticides) are externalised and borne by society in general rather than the individual consumer.

It's worth asking suppliers about organic food, as the costs may not be as high as feared. Schools may feel that any additional cost is justified and can be met by increased income from an independent meal system.

Some organic suppliers are listed in the *Directory of Suppliers, Services and Support*.

Real Change in Action

Three case studies of Essex primary schools

Introduction

In May 2004, Colin Canfield, a former Essex primary head, carried out case studies of three schools for East Anglia Food Link.

The case studies show how three schools have set about making the change from relying on contract catering to providing meals independently. All three have made the change over the past 20 months, in one case just four weeks ago.

The message from all three schools is that the change was achieved with little difficulty and that the benefits, to the school and in terms of wider sustainability, have proved considerable. Despite the varying time scales and other differing circumstances, the schools demonstrate striking similarities in the benefits achieved.

Fuller versions of these case studies are available on EAFL's website, at www.eafl.org.uk/essex.

The Results of Change

The most obvious result, in all three schools, has been significantly increased uptake in meals, bringing additional income and potential for increased spending to improve quality, service and staff conditions.

Comparison of meal prices and uptake before and after in-house catering introduced

School	Pupils	Change to in-house service	Before Meal price	Before Uptake	After Meal price	After Uptake	Increase in uptake
Great Easton	155	April 2003	£1.50	30	£1.50	105 (+6 staff)	250%
Eastwood (+infant)	215 + 146	Sept 2002	£1.40	140	£1.40	160 (+10 staff)	14% (falling roll)
Beckers Green	303	April 2004	£1.40	100	£1.50	120	20% (in 4 weeks)

Benefits for the School

The schools have each experienced at least some of the following benefits from running an independent catering service:

- Improved quality and size of meals
- Improved dining experience
- Improved staff pay, conditions and morale
- Greater security of staffing
- Awards for school, boosting morale and increasing profile

The schools have also found, as hoped, that improving the meals service has contributed to their wider drive for improved standards.

Improved Sustainability

In addition to the benefits felt by the schools, their pupils, parents and staff, wider benefits have ensued in improved sustainability.

Local employment and skills

- **Increased employment:** all the schools have had to, or plan to, increase staff hours
- **Increased wages:** in the schools where the new system has been running for a year or more, wages have been increased and terms improved
- **Upskilling:** staff have been given, or will receive, training to improve skills and knowledge of food safety and high-level cleaning
- **Job satisfaction:** staff morale has increased, with greater feeling of involvement, responsibility, and pride, resulting in lower staff turnover

Local economy

The local economy benefits both from the increased employment amongst school staff and greater use of local suppliers. With higher spending on ingredients, and more of it going to local suppliers, benefits to the local economy are significant, and further multiplied by suppliers' local spending.

Social

Increased uptake of meals means more children eating together, often with teachers, and improving their social skills.

Health

All the schools have introduced healthier meals and enjoyed increased uptake. Slow change has succeeded in changing the children's eating habits, in contrast to other parts of the country where change has been rushed.

Great Easton C of E Primary School Snow Hill, Great Easton, Essex (155 pupils)

The Basics

Great Easton opted out of the contract meals service in April 2003, owing to:

- Staff and parent concerns about quality and nutritional value
- Wish to improve the quality of the pupils' dining experience
- Contractor's staffing difficulties placing increasing burden on school

It was felt that only a change to independent catering would give the school control over these factors. It was clear the school could not fail to improve on the existing meals, so staff decided to take the plunge.

Beforehand, 30 children were eating a cooked lunch. After just 1 year, this has risen to 105 children, joined by 6 staff, with numbers still rising.

The Benefits

The school has experienced a number of benefits since taking over responsibility for provision of meals.

- More **nutritious**, more **substantial** and **better presented** meals
 - Meals generate a **small profit** allowing a small **pay rise** for kitchen staff
 - School has won **two awards** under the "Healthy Schools" initiative
 - Lunch now makes a significant contribution to the school's drive for **high standards**, whereas before it was felt to be detracting from this
 - Kitchen staff are **happier**, feel **part of the school** and are proud of the service
 - School now has confidence in a **stable kitchen staff**, against previous uncertainty as to whether anyone would turn up to cook at all
 - Spending on **ketchup** has declined, indicating that children no longer need to disguise the flavour of their meals
-

Who does what under the new system?

Head Teacher, Gill Hopkins

- Initiated change with support of school governors
- Overall responsibility absorbed into general management role, including managing additional staff and termly approval of menus
- New responsibilities haven't significantly increased workload

Catering Manager, Carolyn Wiffen

- Recruited from within existing support staff
- Now working 26 hours a week, allowing 5 hours per day and additional weekly hour for shopping
- Responsible for menu design, food purchase and budgeting (including half-termly stock take to check that meals are keeping within budget)

Administration Officer, Sally Rowe

- Responsible for staff contracts and salaries, maintenance of kitchen equipment, the processing of food orders and, as before, dinner money collection (1 extra hour a week)

Office Assistant, Linda

- Collection and banking of dinner monies (5 extra hours a week)

Consortium Finance Manager

- Annual preparation of catering budget

There has been a small amount of extra work involved, especially during the first few months, but this has been more than outweighed by the benefits and the additional income from increased sales.

Staff hours and conditions in the kitchen

Before 2 kitchen staff (in theory), working 20 and 10 hours per week

After 2 kitchen staff, working 26 and 20 hours per week

1 midday assistant helping with washing up for extra 5 hours/wk

Salaries paid at one increment higher than previously, due for further review in light of success

An increase of 190% in staff hours has been required for 350% increase in school meals, with much extra genuine cooking (as opposed to warming food up), illustrating the benefits of increased efficiencies of scale.

Hygiene and food safety

Environmental Health Officer

- The school worked closely with the district council EHO from the outset, making clear that they were anxious to follow best practice
- Examined condition of the kitchen and the school's kitchen equipment
- Made recommendations about staff training and qualifications

Staff training and qualifications

- Carolyn and her assistant have taken the official basic hygiene course, and Carolyn will be taking the intermediate course this year
- *Health & Safety Policy for School Kitchens* and *Food Safety Policy & Hazard Analysis* (Hygiene Audit Services, £220+VAT for the two) have been a worthwhile source of guidance and provide regular updates

Suppliers - buying in food and services

Before the in-house service started, a single supplier was used. The school now uses four food suppliers and is planning to develop use of local suppliers in the coming months.

- **Local pig farmer.** Supplying weekly standing order of ham. This is an excellent product, but the school had to make clear that each delivery must be stamped with the name of the farm and best before date.
- **Local butcher, Great Dunmow.** Supplying weekly standing order of other meat products and invoicing monthly.
- **Tesco supermarket, Great Dunmow.** Used for weekly shop of fruit and vegetables, pasta, milk and sugar, fruit squashes and sauces, and occasional items, totalling c£80/week. Carolyn likes being able to look at produce before buying, but Tesco have been unhelpful in not allowing payment by invoice, though they may soon set up an account.
- **DBC, Chelmsford.** Supply all other items. Carolyn puts in a telephone order, which is usually promptly delivered.

Other services are provided as follows:

- **Pest control** provided by Pestwise, Chelmsford
 - **Machinery maintenance** provided under contract
 - **High-level cleaning** carried out by caretaker
-

Menus - design and practice

- **2 week rolling menu of set hot option.** Drawn up by Carolyn twice a year, approved by Gill and sent home to parents. Includes roast meat, fish and pasta (once a week each) served with vegetables or salad
- **Cold alternative of baguette** with choice of filling (ham, sausage, tuna, egg, cheese) and salad, chosen in the morning
- **Choice of dessert** - cooked, yoghurt, fresh fruit or fresh fruit salad
- **Alternatives** provided for children on special diets (2 vegetarians, 1 gluten-free diet, 3 nut allergies) as indicated by parents
- For simplicity and safety, the school has become **nut-free**. This proved easy as the school now prepares almost all its own food

The children voice their views through the school council. Carolyn considers these when drawing up menus, as well as her experience of what children will eat and the need for a healthy diet. It is clear that children will eat proper food, if it is well cooked and presented and they have got used to it.

The hot/cold alternative initially caused a few problems, with children changing their minds at the last minute. The simple remedy has been to prepare a few extra meals, at little cost and also providing second helpings.

The Dining Experience

The school wished to improve the dining experience as well as the quality of the food. What, staff asked, would they most object to if this was their daily dining experience? The priority was to stop serving food on airline trays and use china crockery, stainless steel cutlery and ordinary plastic trays. Two plates proved to be easier to wash than airline trays. Some initial expenditure was involved but breakages have been few.

Towards a Whole School Approach

The new system has made a real contribution to overall teaching on healthy living. Staff believed that for this lesson to be properly taught, it must be reinforced by the school's own practice. This is done through the school lunch and the sale of healthy snacks at morning break, also prepared by kitchen staff.

The new ventures enabled the whole school community to be actively involved in attaining the nationally recognised Advanced Healthy Schools Award in November 2004.

Eastwood Junior School

Rayleigh Road, Eastwood, Leigh-on-Sea (215 + 146 pupils)

The Basics

Eastwood Junior School has 215 pupils but has always cooked for the neighbouring Infant School of 146. The school decided to take its catering service in-house in September 2002, even though the number of children buying lunch was relatively high, at 140 for both schools. Motivation for change came from:

- Dissatisfaction about the quality and nutritional value of lunch
- Increasing unreliability of food deliveries, which on occasions had made it barely possible to feed the children at all

The need for change was particularly felt by catering manager, Mrs Verna Hines. She had worked at the school for 22 years and remembered the time before catering was contracted out, when she led a "training kitchen", to which Essex County Council sent newly appointed cooks to gain experience.

Not surprisingly, she was anxious to provide a better service. As the then head teacher also wanted to do this, governors were consulted and the decision to make the change was taken.

Two Years On

With a significantly lower roll, an average of 160 child meals per day are prepared for the two schools, and approximately 10 for staff. Since better food products are purchased, meals have improved in quality as well as quantity, with a major shift towards the promotion of healthier eating.

Benefits have been very noticeable even though the school was somewhat protected under the old system by having such an experienced Catering Manager, able at times to stamp her foot and insist that food should be cooked in her kitchen, not merely warmed up. Even so, meals were then prepared largely from frozen food instead of fresh, as now.

The meal price has remained at £1.40 even though more is now spent on food. Currently this amounts to about 45p per meal (32%), but the figure is misleading as the midday meal is subsidised by the "Healthy Snacks" tuck shop at morning break-time. Fresh fruit, sandwiches and flapjacks are sold, and every purchase comes with a carrot stick. The carrot is free and has become amazingly popular.

Based on these figures, school meals at Eastwood Junior School still just about break even. It is a close run thing, so it may not be long before a price rise becomes unavoidable. Nevertheless, the school is clear that it became involved in independent catering to provide an improved service, not to make a profit, and it is in that spirit that the service will continue.

Allocation of Responsibilities

Head Teacher

- Overall responsibility for and management of the system
- Preparation of annual catering budget as part of general budget
- Has made promotion of healthy eating a priority
- Takes especial interest in menu design

Catering Manager, Verna Hines

- Draws up menus
- Responsible for ordering food, food costs, stock rotation and all practical matters relating to the day to day running of the kitchen

Office Manager, Maureen Sagroft

- Responsible for kitchen staff contracts, salaries, processing of food orders and collection of dinner money
- Overall workload not significantly greater from independent catering

Essex County Council

- Payroll and personnel services purchased from Essex County Council

Governors' Catering Sub-committee

- Recently set up to consider how best to promote a healthy diet
- Meets monthly, role still evolving

Staff hours and conditions in the kitchen

Before 8 kitchen staff (4 job-share), working 20, 15, 10, 8, 6, 6, 4, 4 hrs/wk

After 8 kitchen staff, working similar hours

All staff given pay rise and terms revised, bringing them into line with other school support staff, ending feeling of "them and us"

Hygiene and Food Safety

Environmental Health Officer

- Advised on condition of kitchen and equipment
- Recommended replacement of chipped worktops, acted on immediately by governors

Catering Manager

- No other obstacles encountered due to Verna's long experience
- Continued to take responsibility for all the usual necessary and statutory hygiene and kitchen safety procedures

Site Manager

- Responsible for routine safety checking of electrical equipment

Suppliers

The school previously used a single supplier, but now uses four:

- **Local butcher.** Provides school with all meat products used
- **Local greengrocer.** Supplies all fruit and vegetables
- **Thos Ridleys,** Bury St Edmunds. Supplies milk and dried goods
- **Brakes,** Chelmsford. Supplying frozen foods.

All suppliers deliver to the school and invoice monthly. While the prices are similar to before, the quality is definitely superior. Bread and rolls are made in the kitchen and are very popular.

The school is hoping to use more local suppliers in the near future and to buy organic produce where possible.

Suppliers of other services include:

- **Pest control** provided by Pestwise, Chelmsford
 - Routine **equipment maintenance** and **high-level cleaning** undertaken by Site Manager, including twice-yearly stripping down of all fans and light covers. This large job is recognised through payment of overtime, with school still saving some money on contractor costs
-

Menu Design

- Determined by Verna
- Initially 4-week rolling menu with daily meat-based and vegetarian options
- Now simplified to 2-week rolling menu, with similar alternatives
- Choice between vegetables and salad, and potatoes, pasta and bread
- Dessert choice of cooked pudding, yoghurt or fresh fruit
- No processed food used under normal circumstances, increasing workload but helping with budgeting and improving meal quality
- Children have been found to appreciate real food if it is well cooked and presented although a period of acclimatisation is sometimes needed
- Problem of children finding their first choice has gone is addressed by rotating the order in which they go up to the hatch, but more portions are cooked than likely to be required, so complaints are rare
- The school has six genuine vegetarians and portions of the vegetarian option are held back for them if necessary
- Although no children have nut allergies the school has become nut-free (and sesame-free) to guard against any concerns in the future
- Two children with a milk allergy are given different meals when necessary

Promotions and Theme Days

During the last two years the school has held regular theme days which have proved so popular that new ones have been added. Examples include St Valentine's Day, Easter and Harvest dinners, a Tudor lunch and even Numeracy Dinner. Typically, meal take-up on these days rises to well over 200, but this figure is exceeded in its turn at Christmas, when almost every child in both schools chooses a cooked lunch.

Beckers Green Primary School

Beckers Green Road, Braintree (303 pupils)

The Basics

Beckers Green Primary School assumed responsibility for its own catering only from the 19th April 2004 after the contract negotiated by Essex County Council came to an end.

As the school had considered taking meals in-house in the past, staff and governors welcomed this development because they felt it gave them the necessary push. Opportunities to be welcomed included:

- Improving **quality of meals**
- Ensuring that the lunch hour contributes to the **drive for high standards**

The number of pupils eating a cooked lunch each day has averaged 100, of whom almost half were entitled to a free meal (out of 76 eligible). After just 4 weeks of the new system, with no advertising or promotion, uptake has already increased to 120 and continues to rise weekly. This is despite the price of meals having gone up by 10p, to £1.50, to reflect the improved quality and larger portions (50p is spent on ingredients per meal). In addition, a large number of staff have started buying meals.

Some interesting issues

A potentially very useful future development is the school's likely involvement in a **cluster** of three or four neighbouring schools, specifically to discuss catering matters. The Chair of Governors, Mrs Lesley Bojko, is a food safety expert and her professional work has suggested the possibility of such a cluster, which it is hoped will provide opportunities for Catering Managers to discuss shared issues and concerns and to benefit from each other's experience.

For some time the school has run a **Lunch Club**, where local senior citizens are invited into school once a week, to have lunch with the children and afterwards, if they are willing, to play chess and other games with some of them. At present only about five local residents come to these lunches, but the school sees its new meal service as an important opportunity to promote them and to achieve a larger attendance in the future.

Allocation of Responsibilities

Chair of Governors, Mrs Lesley Bojko

- Food safety expert and Environmental Health Officer
- Lead rôle in helping the school set up procedures that promote "best practice" in nutrition, food handling, hygiene, general health & safety
- Insists that this should not, and need not, be a bureaucratic exercise, but that good standards are achieved through a broad, intelligent overview

Head Teacher

- Day to day responsibility for general oversight and management
- Will draw up annual catering budget within general school budget
- Will devise school nutrition policy with Governors

Office Manager, Andrea Talmage

- Responsible for kitchen staff contracts and salaries, processing of food orders and, as before, collection of dinner money
- Extra duties require additional 1 hour per week, paid as overtime

Catering Manager, Lorraine Marsay

- Responsible for food budget, ordering food, stock rotation, drawing up menus and other practical matters
- Has recently completed "intermediate" course in food hygiene

Essex County Council

- Provide payroll and personnel services

Suppliers

Lesley hopes that the school will closely examine the issue of suppliers in the near future. She would like the school to use some organic produce, if it can be sourced affordably.

For the time being, the school is using just two suppliers:

- **Readings, Braintree** (recently bought by **Colchester Produce**), a local fruit and vegetable wholesaler
- **Brakes, Chelmsford**, supplying all other ingredients

For other services:

- **Pestwise** is used for the statutory pest control contract
 - The school intends to negotiate with the **Site Manager** for high level cleaning to be undertaken by him
-

Staff hours and conditions in the kitchen

There are currently three kitchen staff:

- **Catering Manager**, Lorraine, works 22½ hours per week
- **2 Kitchen Assistants** work 13¾ and 7½ hours per week

These hours are unchanged from the contract catering system, but are expected to increase, reflecting the increased uptake of meals and greater use of "home cooking" rather than processed food. The balance is currently 50:50, but is shifting and will have implications for future staff time.

Lorraine is "busier but much happier", enjoying the additional freedom to run the kitchen in the way she thinks best. She likes feeling that she is now working directly for the children instead of a profit-making company, and is increasingly proud of the service the kitchen is able to provide.

Lorraine has not received a pay rise under the new system but did receive a substantial rise last year when the contract caterers were required to increase staff pay.

It is anticipated that kitchen staff's entitlement to holidays, sickness benefits etc. will soon come into line with those of other school support staff. Beyond this, it is likely that the pay of the two kitchen assistants will soon be considered as they did not receive a significant rise last year and their pay remains low relative to other school support staff.

Menu Design

Just a few weeks into its new catering system, lunch menus at Beckers Green are still in an experimental phase.

- Children were consulted by questionnaire about what they would like to eat and a competition was run to name the new service, which consequently delights in the alliterative title of "Cool Kids Café"
 - A 4 week rolling menu is offered, with a daily choice between a meat-based and vegetarian main meal, served with potatoes and veg or salad
 - Choice of dessert - cooked pudding, fresh fruit, fruit salad and ice cream
 - Choice of drink - milk, fruit juice
 - Currently provides for just 2 special diets - 1 pupil eats no pork for religious reasons, 1 adult requires gluten-free meals
 - Vegetarian option always provided, but school has no strict vegetarians
-

Afterword

By Colin Canfield

Having visited a number of schools to discover how they are managing independent catering, I have been struck by the fact that all the schools where this is working successfully or showing real promise have much in common. There are marked similarities between the arrangements at which schools have arrived, even though they have set up their systems largely in isolation.

Most noticeable is that all schools where the change to in-house catering has gone well have seen it as a real opportunity to improve an important aspect of the school's life and the service the school provides. Catering is not seen as an inconvenient nuisance detracting from the other things the school should be doing.

This in turn creates a climate in which catering managers and kitchen staff are able to see themselves as fully part of the school's staff team, properly supported by other colleagues and working co-operatively with them for the benefit of the pupils. If there is one condition above all which my visits suggest is necessary for success, then this is it.

What could certainly benefit even successful schools in the future, however, would be increased opportunities for schools to meet and learn from each other, and for colleagues to have their sights extended in ways not readily open to single schools working alone. Alternative approaches to menu design and the availability of local food producers are two issues where schools would benefit from sharing experiences and information.

Some schools will continue to need quite basic help. This may be more difficult to provide, as they may also be the schools where there is little awareness of, or interest in, the opportunities that independent school catering can bring in the first place. Where this is the case, it will not be surprising if catering managers sometimes feel overstretched and unsupported.

This is a pity, for the experience of other schools shows this situation to be quite unnecessary. I hope that the advice and guidance contained in this booklet will help to ensure it is relatively rare.
