

Dear Parents/Carers

Lunchtime issues raised by parents on Facebook

I am writing to address some of the issues raised by parents/carers, and commented upon by others, on Facebook on Thursday evening.

On Wednesday after school the stage was arranged in the way we are going to need it for the Christmas play (that lots of children are participating in), which means it has taken up a significant chunk of the hall, so fewer tables were able to be put up on Thursday. I was out of school that day, so I wasn't aware there had been an issue initially. Having spoken to the relevant staff on Friday morning though, it became evident that it took longer to get all children through the hall for their lunch and some year 5s were about 10 minutes late back to class as they were allowed time to finish their lunch.

On Friday I suggested that some packed lunch children should be allowed to sit on the stage and eat their lunch 'picnic style', thereby freeing up tables for those having a hot dinner. We got through lunches much quicker on Friday so it certainly helped, however there was a misunderstanding between myself and the lunch staff which meant that the stage was over crowded. I take full responsibility for not making my instructions more explicit. I didn't intend that all packed lunch children would eat on the stage which led to a small number of them not wanting to eat there when their friends were sitting elsewhere. That said, lots of children loved the novelty of eating on the stage and suggested we should have picnic blankets!

It was clear from the comments I read that many parents are unaware of our lunchtime systems. Let me explain.

Hot dinner children and packed lunch children all go into the hall at the same time, with year 3 and 4 going first on a rota system. Years 5 and 6 are also on a rota, following on from years 3 and 4, so sometimes they will go into dinners 3rd, but sometimes they will be last.

Lunchtime for years 3 and 4 is from 12pm to 1pm and for years 5 and 6 it is from 12.15pm to 1.15pm. This means we have 1 hour 15 mins to get 500 children through the hall to eat their lunch. The lunchtime supervisors and kitchen staff work together to keep a steady flow of children through the hall. Sometimes though children attend one of our many lunchtime clubs, play rehearsals etc so the staff also have to be aware of this and have to track down those who haven't eaten lunch.

I would like to address some of the specific comments raised on Facebook:

- **'so late in they can't eat their packed lunch'**

Whether they are first in or last in, we allow a reasonable amount of time for children to eat their packed lunch (or hot lunch). In a worst case scenario the older children will have 15 minutes but more often than not they have 20 minutes or longer. I have witnessed for myself some children choosing not to eat all their packed lunch as they have had enough or would prefer to go out and see their friends. We do encourage children to eat what they have brought but can't force them. We ensure they take uneaten food home so parents can monitor how much, and what, they have eaten.

- **'Why should hot dinners go first?'**

They don't. Children go in together. It would probably be more convenient for us to separate children who are having hot dinners from those having packed lunches but then they would not necessarily be able to eat lunch with their friends, which children really do protest about.

- **'they are told to rush'**

This is not wholly accurate. Sometime staff (and I include myself in this as I do spend time in the hall most lunchtimes, along with other senior staff) do have to chivvy children along as they are so busy

chatting they are not actually eating, or eating very slowly. It's lovely to see them being sociable but they do need to eat their lunch!

- **'Why can't one hall be used for hot dinners and the other for pack ups?'**

- 'The space is there'.**

- As I explained above, we do not separate packed lunch children from hot dinner children. We allow them to choose whether they are having a hot lunch or not (can depend on what's on the menu) and they can switch on a day to day basis if they wish to. Children want the flexibility to decide where to sit and who with, rather than be directed to a specific area designated for packed lunch/hot dinners.

- It's also not quite as simplistic as saying 'the space is there'. Yes, there is another hall, but that hall is used for PE lessons right up to lunchtime. If we were to use it for lunches, the hall would be out of action earlier to allow time for it to be set up, thereby reducing hall time for PE lessons.

- Additionally, the other hall is used on certain days at lunchtimes for clubs and activities.

- **'could stagger lunches – 11.30pm to 12.30pm and 12.30pm to 1.30pm'**

- This may sound like a sensible solution but, in reality, there are many logistical problems with this suggestion.

- The main problem would be a timetabling/curriculum one. The main hall would only be available for PE, assemblies, visitors linked to the curriculum, theatre companies etc during the first and last sessions of the day. The way we currently run lunchtimes does maximise use of both halls and, with 17 classes, we need as much hall time as possible. The main hall is the only one that fits in the whole school. The children really would miss out on some fantastic opportunities if our main hall was less accessible.

- Another issue with this is a social one. Years 3 and 4 would never be able to socialise with their friends or siblings in years 5 and 6, essentially dividing the school in two, which I certainly don't feel would be a good move!

More often than not, lunchtimes run smoothly, all children get time to eat their lunch and have a play outside, attend a club or go to 'Chat 'n' Chill'. I know this because I am there and see it for myself. There are occasions, however, when something can happen that mean things don't run as smoothly as we would like them to but I want to assure you that we always take the time to reflect and review what hasn't worked in order to try and address it as best we can.

The lunchtime supervisors and kitchen staff at DJS work incredibly hard at what is a challenging time of the day, a time when children are in a less structured environment and want to 'let off a bit of steam' having been working hard all morning. They are a great team and do a fabulous job!

I hope that, as parents and carers, you know that I welcome feedback about any issues related to the school. It is important that I find out your views as otherwise I am not aware of any concerns you may have and, therefore, am unable to address them. That's why I sent out a questionnaire recently that a large number of you returned to school (thank you very much).

Please, in future, if you have a concern, query or suggestion, contact the school by phone or email (driffield.juniors@eastriding.gov.uk) , or we can arrange a time to meet to discuss it.

In the meantime, whilst the stage is still up, we will try our hardest to make lunchtimes run as efficiently as possible as it did today - it was 12.45pm today when the last children came into the hall for lunch. Hurray!

Yours sincerely,

Linda Laird