

## **Parents frequently asked questions regarding free school meals from September 2014**

With the onset of the universal school programme in September 2014 which will entitle all 4-7 year olds to a free school meal, parents have raised some common questions which we thought we would address.

This programme is a great opportunity for these children to re-fuel in the middle of their day, to sit and socialise with their friends, develop their tastebuds and to learn some skills that will stay with them for life. We want to make it a positive experience for your child/children so if any of your concerns are not answered in the questions below do not hesitate to get in contact with us.

### **1. Q: “I’m not sure I want my child to eat a hot meal lunchtime as we eat a hot meal together in the evening anyway”**

A: At the end of the day the one thing I am sure your child says to you is “I’m hungry” - Children are very active in school and burn off calories quickly - eating 2 good quality hot meals a day is not usually a problem for the majority of children! School meals have strict nutritional guidelines and by taking a hot meal in school every day your child will have a balanced set of nutrients, unlike the majority of lunchboxes which a government study showed were higher in salt and fats and tend to be very repetitive in their content. Only 1% of packed lunches in a government study were found to have the same nutritional value as a school lunch.

### **2. Q: “My child is very fussy which is why they tend not to choose school dinners”**

A: Children often act differently in school and will make choices that they wouldn’t at home. We have a variety of foods on offer across the week so discuss the options with your child and perhaps choose their favourite meals to make them feel comfortable initially, such as the roast dinner or a spaghetti bolognaise. Children will follow their friends and tend to eat a wider range of different foods; they might be more adventurous than you think!!

### **3. Q: “I have been told that the portion size is not big enough and my child might come home hungry”**

A: Again we have strict guidelines to the quantity of food given but rest assured if your child takes all the food on offer they will not be hungry as they can top up with extra veg, salad, bread and fruit! Should your child be hungry they can speak to the catering manager or if your child doesn’t feel comfortable doing that then please contact the catering manager to discuss your child – we will be only too happy to help. Being active in school during the afternoon can also contribute to them coming home hungry, so speak to your child and find out what options they are taking and what else they have been doing in school all day.

### **4. Q: “Will we get the opportunity to see/try the meals that my child will be eating?”**

A: Yes. We are hoping to hold regular tasters and/or parent to lunch days.

### **5. Q: “Will my child just be able to eat once or twice a week or will they have to eat every day of the week?”**

A: Of course we are hoping that you will encourage your child to have a meal every day but there will be the opportunity to choose as there is now.

**6. Q: “In Sept, will I still have to order/book a lunch for my child in the infants even though they are entitled to one every day”?**

A: Yes, you will still need book the school lunch in order for the kitchen to produce correct and sufficient number of menu options.

**7. Q: “I’m concerned that because more children will be eating across the school that the kitchen will be unable to provide the same quality of home cooked food as they do now”**

A: We will not compromise on our standards. Food is cooked freshly on site every day and we will continue to do this to offer children the best food possible and to meet stringent food standards. It’s worth noting that we purchase most of our fresh meat and fruit and veg locally so you are helping us support local businesses and the local economy too.

**8. Q: “I’m afraid that the dinner ladies will upset my child by making them eat something they don’t want to”**

A: All staff are trained to positively encourage the children to eat a reasonable amount of their meal and to try new foods, but your child will never be forced to eat. Our ethos is to offer a balanced plate of food so we will always try and encourage your child to take vegetables or help themselves to the salad bar.

**9. Q: “With the school catering for more pupils how will the lunch time service be organised to minimise queuing/waiting time so that pupils have sufficient time to eat and enjoy their lunch and also get time to play with friends?”**

A: We will be considering a number of options to implement on a trial basis, from longer, two sitting staggered service times to the possibility of an additional service point to help speed things up.