

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: THE NEW SCHOOL LUNCH STANDARDS

GENERAL

How do these standards compare with the existing standards?

- The new standards are much tougher than the existing standards. They not only tighten up on the types of food that can be offered in schools but also set out what the nutrient content of a school lunch should be, and importantly, encourage children to make healthier choices.
- The new food-group standards will apply across the school day to breakfast clubs, lunches, tuck shops and vending machines, as well as after-school clubs.

How will the standards be enforced?

- The food standards will be mandatory, which means schools will have to comply legally. If they do not, anyone will be free to complain to the Secretary of State who can issue a direction to the school if necessary.
- In addition, Ofsted will be monitoring a school's approach to healthier eating as part of their regular inspections of schools.
- Parents also will be a key player in monitoring the quality of food at their children's school.

Where can I see the new standards?

- The new standards are available at www.teachernet.gov.uk/healthyliving

Which schools will be covered by the standards?

- Coverage will be as follows:

Primary Schools	Will be required to follow new 'food based' and 'nutrient based' standards.
Secondary Schools	Will be required to follow new 'food based' and 'nutrient based' standards.
Maintained Special Schools	Will be required to follow new 'food based' and 'nutrient based' food standards (implementation September 2009). The regulations do not apply to food provided at maintained special schools after school hours or at the weekend.
Maintained Nursery Schools	Will be required to follow the existing 'food based' standards introduced in 2001.

Non-Maintained Nursery Settings – private and voluntary sector.	Not covered by the standards.
Maintained Boarding Schools	Will be required to follow new ‘food based’ and ‘nutrient based’ food standards. The regulations do not apply to food provided at maintained boarding schools after school hours or at weekends.
PRUs	Will be required to follow new ‘food based’ and ‘nutrient based’ food standards.
CTCs	Many CTCs already have healthier eating awards. There will be no requirement for CTCs to adhere to standards in regulations for maintained schools. However, most CTCs have already converted, or will soon be converting to Academy status when the position with academy policy will apply.
Academies	Academies will be expected to apply the same standards as maintained schools, but the obligation will come through their funding agreements rather than legislation.
Non-Maintained Special Schools	Will be required to follow new standards by virtue of paragraph 12(6) of The Education Non-maintained Special Schools 1999 regs.
Children’s Homes	Not covered by these standards.

Why do maintained nursery schools not need to follow the new standards?

DfES is currently consulting on The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, which will place on providers a specific welfare requirement that ‘children are provided with nutritious food and drink to meet their needs’. The EYFS will also include good practice for providers. Providers will be directed to a range of information about nutritional standards, including the updated Caroline Walker Trust guidance on which the new school meals standards are modelled.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has provided a grant to the Caroline Walker Trust, to update its guidance “*Eating Well for Under-5s in Child Care*”, associated menu planner software and training pack, to ensure these materials are brought into line with current nutritional recommendations (e.g. new salt targets).

DfES is currently considering whether it can build on this work and develop new guidance materials for food and drink in early years settings.

What about packed lunches? Will there be standards for them?

- Any free, or paid for school lunches will need to meet the standards, regardless of whether the lunch takes the form of a packed lunch.
- The Government has no plans to introduce standards for packed lunches that are brought from home. However, the School Food Trust (SFT) and Food Standards Agency will be producing advice for parents later this year on healthier packed lunches.
- Schools can also have a role in determining what a packed lunch should and should not contain if they choose to do so. Some schools for example already have school food policies that ban certain products from being brought into school in packed lunches.

Won't children just opt for bringing in packed lunches rather than eating healthier school meals?

- The choice over whether to choose a packed lunch or school meal is clearly one for parents and their children to make. However, a key element of any strategy for maintaining a successful school meals service will be encouraging and persuading children to take up a school meal. Greater take-up will provide economies of scale and a more viable and cost effective meal service.
- FSA research has shown that packed lunches are generally less healthy than school lunches which meet the current statutory standards
- The School Food Trust has a target to increase the take-up of school meals in school in England by 4 percentage points by March 2008, and by 10 percentage points by autumn 2009.

How will we know if sausages contain banned carcass parts, or whether a product has been deep fried as part of the manufacturing process?

- When considering procurement arrangements, schools and caterers should ensure that suppliers of all products, including meat products, can demonstrate that they can meet the standards. The required standards should form part of the contractual agreement. If there is any reasonable doubt as to whether any products being supplied against the contract comply with those standards, they should not be accepted. In such circumstances, the procurement department should be notified and an alternative means of meeting the requirements should be considered, bearing in mind any contractual restrictions limiting use of a different supplier.

How do cakes/biscuits figure in all this?

- Cakes and biscuits can be served as part of school lunches. For other times of the day, the SFT will issue clarifying guidance which will cover this

point.

Should there be only one choice of healthy meal at lunchtime?

- The SFT *suggests* limited choice within a range of healthier options. Some choice is necessary to cater for diverse cultural needs (e.g. vegetarian, halal). In secondary schools especially, where children have been used to unrestricted choice, restriction to a single option may discourage take up of healthier meals.

Where can schools and caterers go for support?

- The SFT, working with Healthy Schools and other partners, will be providing practical support and guidance to schools, local authorities and catering *providers* on meeting the standards for school food and encouraging children and young people to eat healthier food.

I'm not sure if [product name] meets the standards or not. Where can I go to get advice?

- You can call the School Food Trust's helpline on 0800 089 5001. Where necessary, decision on specific products will be made following discussions between the Trust, the Food Standards Agency and DfES.

BANNED FOODS

What will be banned and what happens if children won't eat healthier meals?

- The new food-based standards will effectively ban low quality burgers from school lunches, as well as chocolate, crisps, and sweetened fizzy drinks. The standards will also limit how often schools can offer deep-fried food such as chips.
- Healthier meals don't have to be more expensive or less popular. For example the Barking Abbey School in London reworked its menu to significantly reduce the amount of manufactured food on offer and meal uptake has actually increased by 30%.

So what exactly will be banned and what not?

- The SFT guide to the food based standards will provide advice on this.

Why isn't the guidance available now?

- Now government has announced the standards, the School Food Trust will work to produce a guide to introducing the food based standards as quickly as possible, aiming to publish late June.

Does this mean no more chips?

- The new standards require that no more than two deep fried foods can be

served in any single week. That includes deep-fried chips and oven-baked products which have been deep-fried as part of the manufacturing process.

What about chocolate and other confectionery, excluding cocoa powder used in chocolate cakes and biscuits?

- Confectionery, chocolate and chocolate-coated products will not be available.

And savoury snacks?

- The only savoury snacks allowed will be nuts and seeds with no added salt and sugar. Fruit and vegetables should also be available.

Why are nuts allowed when children might be allergic?

- This is a matter for local decision making. The Government considers that headteachers and school governors are best placed to make decisions that take into account local circumstances.

Why is the Government demonising particular sorts of food by banning them?

- The Government believes that there are no 'bad' foods, but a significant number of children and young people have bad diets. Evidence shows that even where healthier food is available, many children tend still to choose less healthy options, particularly food which is high in fat, salt and sugar. The School Meals Review Panel's advice to Ministers recommended that choice should be restricted as a means of encouraging children to make healthier choices.
- The Government wants children to eat a healthier diet and believes that to help achieve this it is necessary to limit children's access to certain foods/drinks whilst they are at school. However, once outside of school we would ask parents to support the drive to encourage their children to continue to eat a balanced diet. This means eating plenty of fruit and vegetables and limiting the amount of sugar, salt and fats that they consume. It is also important that food served is consistent with what children learn in the classroom.

Where is the legislation that supports these new mandatory standards?

- Regulations to give the food-based standards statutory force will be introduced in September. Regulations giving the food other than lunch and nutrient-based standards will immediately follow Royal Assent for the Education and Inspections Bill 2005, anticipated by January 2007.

Where can I get more information about the nutrient standards and the standards for other school food?

- In due course, the SFT will produce guidance on these standards.

STANDARDS FOR OTHER SCHOOL FOOD

What about food served at mid-morning break?

- Food served at mid-morning break will be covered by the standards for food served at other times of the day i.e. non-lunch.

What about other school outlets? Will all chocolate be banned etc? What about sports or diet drinks?

- Vending machines and tuck shops will be required to meet similar healthier standards as school meals - replacing crisps, chocolate and sweetened fizzy drinks with water, juice, milk, fruit and healthier snacks.
- This will mean chocolate and non-chocolate sweets such as chewing gum, wine gums, marshmallows etc will be banned as well as savoury snacks like crisps, salted nuts and tortilla chips. Sweetened fizzy drinks will also be banned.
- Schools will have until September 2007 to comply with these standards although they should start to prepare now.

What about the income that schools get from vending machines?

- Some schools receive income from selling chocolate, fizzy drinks etc in their vending machines. Those schools will need to prepare for the change. But many more do not gain financially as the profit goes to the vending contractor. And schools are now moving to healthier vending and making a profit from it.
- The Food Standards Agency report, "Vending Healthy Drinks" in 2004 found that school vending machines selling healthier options were popular and made a profit. Just 12 healthier drinks machines in a small number of secondary schools dispensed no less than 70,000 drinks of juice, milk and water.

Why not allow diet drinks and low salt/low sugar snacks? Surely they are not unhealthy?

- The Government accepted the School Food Trust's advice that all diet drinks and flavoured water should be banned. There is evidence to show that diet drinks can cause dental erosion.
- The Government also wanted to make the standards as simple as possible for schools to follow. Advice from both the SMRP and SFT was to make the standards as simple as possible, including broad categories.

Won't children just buy unhealthy snacks and drinks from outside school and bring them in?

- Clearly children may choose to bring in from outside foods that are banned from being sold in schools.
- The Government has no intention of imposing bans on food being brought in from outside. Those are matters for schools and parents to consider at local level. Many schools already have a snacking policy, which limits the types of food children are able to bring into school either as a snack or as part of a packed lunch, and we encourage them to do so. Schools can implement this as part of their non-statutory decision-making, in the same way as deciding a policy for school uniforms.
- In order to support schools, DfES and SFT will work with schools that have moved or are moving to providing healthier food in vending machines and tuck shops; and with industry players, to identify effective ways of making changes to provision and educating pupils about making healthier choices.

Why wait until September 2007 to regulate for food served at other times of the day? Doesn't this just mean that children will buy unhealthier food from other outlets if they don't like the lunches?

- DfES has to wait for Royal Assent of the Education and Inspections Bill to have the power to implement standards for other school food. However, the department thinks that it is sensible to make the requirement at the beginning of a school year, so that schools and industry have time to make the changes and can consider a whole school approach.

TRAINING FOR CATERING STAFF

Training for school cooks?

- In September 2005 DfES introduced a new vocationally related qualification at Level 1 that recognised for the first time the crucial skills and experience that school cooks bring to their work.
- The aim of the qualification is to give school cooks and caterers the basic knowledge and skills to deliver a healthier meals service. It has been specifically designed for staff involved in the preparation and service of school meals. It enables school cooks to learn:
 - the different **food groups** and their **proportions** in a healthier, balanced diet as recommended by **government guidelines**;
 - those **food commodities** which are more likely to contribute to a healthier diet;
 - how **catering practices** can be modified to improve the **nutrient content** of meals and cafeteria services available to school children;

- how to market and promote healthier meals to pupils – crucial if we are to change children's eating habits in school.
- DfES is reviewing and refining the VRQ to ensure that it meets the new standards.
- There are already well over a hundred qualifications related to food, nutrition and catering which are funded by the LSC. DfES is working with food and education experts to ascertain which of these qualifications, or units from them, are relevant to school caterers. Where a need is found for a specific skill, which does not form part of one of these qualifications, new units or qualifications will be developed to cover that area.
- DfES is looking at including such units in the Training and Development Agency for School's nationally accredited vocational qualification for school support staff. This will enable progression from Level 1 to Levels 2 and 3 and will also help school caterers to feel that they are part of the whole school team.

Procurement Guidance

Contract variation guidance

Where can I find the contract variation guidance?

- The DfES has produced guidance which is on the Healthy Living section of Teachernet alongside the draft main Guidance on Procuring School Meals. Available at <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/wholeschool/healthyliving/foodanddrink/procuringmeals>

Why has this additional guidance been produced?

- It became clear when DfES consulted on the main contracting guidance last year that additional guidance was needed to help those schools locked into long term contracts to vary those contracts.

Who is it aimed at?

- The Guide is primarily aimed at schools. Some of the schools contacted during preparation of the Guide had a very basic level of knowledge about contracting and were uncertain about what to do if they were unhappy with the service delivery. The Guide is intended to help them with this.

What does the Guide include?

- The Guide sets out the reasons why some contracts will need to be

changed. It sets out some of the basic terminology used when dealing with contracts and will help schools to understand the different types of contractual relationship that exist and which sort of contract they have. It sets out how a school can carry out a review of its current contract, including how it can decide whether it is getting value for money and what the options are if a school decides that it wants to make a change. It also emphasises the importance of getting advice from a local authority procurement specialist or others with previous experience of dealing with contracts if they do not have those skills.

Will this provide enough support for schools – surely they need more support than just guidance?

- DEFRA are leading on to provide better support and training for people responsible for procurement including sustainable food procurement. The DfES Centre for Procurement Performance will be working with the School Food Trust to provide support to local authority buyers on contract negotiation and food procurement. The CPP is also developing an approach to coordinating procurement at a regional or sub-regional level to provide better support for authorities and schools in areas such as catering contracts.

What can local authorities do if they are unhappy about an existing catering contract – including where this is part of a PFI contract?

- Where school meal contracts are not working well, DfES expects local authorities to take a strategic lead in improving arrangements. Where contractors are not fulfilling their obligations, the authority should withhold payment in line with the terms of the contract. DfES will always be happy to discuss where individual authorities are having difficulties.

Main guidance on procuring school meals

What is happening with the draft main guidance produced last year?

- This is being updated to reflect the new standards announced today as well as comments received during consultation.

Sustainable procurement

The School Meals Review Panel recommended that the procurement of food served in schools should be consistent with sustainable development principles and schools and caterers should look to local farmers and suppliers for their produce where possible, tempered by a need for menus to meet the new nutritional standards and be acceptable in schools. Does the Department agree with that recommendation?

- DfES fully supports the emphasis given to PSFPI in the School Meals Review Panel's report and encourages schools and local authorities to

give serious consideration to meeting sustainable development principles. The DfES main procurement guidance contains advice on sourcing ingredients using local suppliers. The guidance is being further developed following discussions with the National Audit Office.

- The Department has in place a 'Food Procurement Action Plan', which sets out how we will address the objectives of the Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative. Action taken has mainly been through promoting good practice by publishing case studies on Teachernet, and promoting PSFPI objectives through other work on school meals, including through the commitments made in the Healthy Living Blueprint, and the Secretary of State's determination to improve school meals.