School food standards project

Barnet Public Health
Start & Grow Well Team

SCHOOL FOOD EVIDENCE REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The school environment plays an important role in children's diets and overall health[1]. Young people spend 190 days of the year in school, and therefore, brings a unique opportunity to influence health and wellness[2]. School meals significantly improve educational outcomes[3], and they provide nutritious meals for the millions of children experiencing food insecurity[4]. In addition, several studies have detected a potentially protective effect of universal free school meals on child BMI. There is a growing concern on a national, regional, and local level, that many schools are not meeting the school food standards. With the cost of living and UK childhood obesity levels still on the rise, this is a crucial time to act.

This document presents the findings of research conducted in Barnet to investigate the local school food provision and school food environments. A range of stakeholders were consulted, best practices identified, a brief literature review was conducted, and local case studies were analysed to identify best practice recommendations.

In concurrence with several report findings, the insight presented in this report suggests that most Barnet schools are not meeting the school food standards across the school day, especially regarding water and milk provision and the provision of restricted food items.
Attributable factors include:

- Budget constraints,
- Lower prioritization of school food against other conflicting priorities
- Issues with the understanding of the school food standards.
- School food leads reported issues with food budgets and the management of packed lunches.

The two biggest issues reported by both Parents/Carers and young people were:

- A lack of food variety
- Inadequate portion sizes.

Interviews with stakeholders who support schools to meet the school food standards echoed the above findings and highlighted other important factors such as issues with school food leadership. Some examples of best practices include food growing, seeking advice from a nutrition professional, promoting school meals and signing up for an accreditation scheme e.g., Healthy Schools London.

Six themes were identified as areas of focus from the research and will help to shape the content of the School Food Support Plan:

The development of the School Food Support Plan will be a collaborative process and will continue to reflect the voice of the child.

1. Introduction

The school environment plays an important role in children's diets and overall health[1]. Young people spend 190 days of the year in school, and therefore, brings a unique opportunity to influence health and wellness[2]. School meals significantly improve educational outcomes[3], and they provide nutritious meals for the millions of children experiencing food insecurity[4]. In addition, several studies have detected a potentially protective effect of universal free school meals on child BMI[1]. School is also the only place where we can make certain all children, no matter where they live, are getting a healthy meal.

The school food standards, which were updated in 2021, are mandatory standards set by the Government to ensure that food provided to pupils in state schools are nutritious and of high quality; to promote good nutritional health in all pupils; protect those who are nutritionally vulnerable and to promote good eating behaviour. These standards, for example, place limits on serving deep-fried food, snacks and sugary drinks and ensure children are offered at least one portion of vegetables or salad and at least one portion of fruit each day. A varied diet is promoted, with a spread of foods across the week. Menus should include different fruits, vegetables, grains, pulses and a range of fresh meat and fish. The school food standards are outlined in full detail here[5]. The standards apply across the whole school day including breakfast clubs, snacks, tuck shops and after school clubs.

There is a growing concern from government officials, that many schools are not meeting the school food standards and this assumption is strengthened by several report findings. For example, according to the food for life state of the nation report into children's food, it is estimated that at least 60% of secondary schools are failing to comply with the School Food Standards[4]. In addition, a recent report by 'Bite Back' collated feedback from young people about their experiences with school food. It was reported that school food standards are routinely not being upheld, and participants also said that healthier options are typically not available, pushed into the background or if they are available, they typically cost more[2]. The government 'Levelling Up White paper'[6] published in February 2022, presented future reforms to school food policy, including potential school food audits by the food standards agency.

Regionally, the London Food Strategy[7] developed by the Government London Authority (GLA) on behalf of the Mayor of London and London Food board recognizes the need for change in London schools to ensure that children have access to healthy food which will in turn, support the best start to life. According to the strategy, the GLA committed to producing further guidance to support all schools to implement the School Food Standards and encourage uptake of schemes to support this such as Water Only Primary Schools and Healthy Schools London.

On a local level, school food menu audits have highlighted a concern that many Barnet schools may not be meeting the school food standards. As a result of this, in conjunction with national and regional efforts, the Children and Young People's Public Health team decided to develop a Barnet School Food Standards project, whereby schools will be supported in understanding the school food standards and be empowered to improve school food. With the cost of living and UK childhood obesity levels still on rise, this is a crucial time to act.

From April-July 2022, research into school food provision and school food environments was conducted. The aim of this research was to ensure the right school food support is provided and meets the local need of schools by:

- Gathering local data to determine an estimate on the level and demographic makeup of child beneficiaries of the school food support plan that will be developed. Also, to gain a better understanding of health inequalities that will need to be addressed.
- Using a whole school approach to capture the perceptions of school food leads, Parents/Carers and Young People on the quality of their school's food provision and environment and suggestions for improvement.
- Engaging with local youth outside of the school setting to have a deeper insight into their views on school food.
- Consulting with local school food related stakeholders for e.g., ISS catering to explore strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and barriers to school food quality.
- Identifying best practice-a brief literature review was conducted, and local case studies were analysed to identify best practice recommendations.

This document presents the findings of the school food research conducted in Barnet which will inform the development of the school food support plan, which will help to support schools with improving the school food experience and provision.

2. Local data

2.1 Target population data

In 2020, there were in total 38,600 children aged 5-11, and 14,400 children aged 12-14 living in Barnet[8]. Barnet consists of a diverse population with a non-white population of 48%; the level of diversity more pronounced in children and young people[9].

There are 125 state schools in Barnet[10] which is made up, primary, all through, secondary and special schools (see figure 1 below).

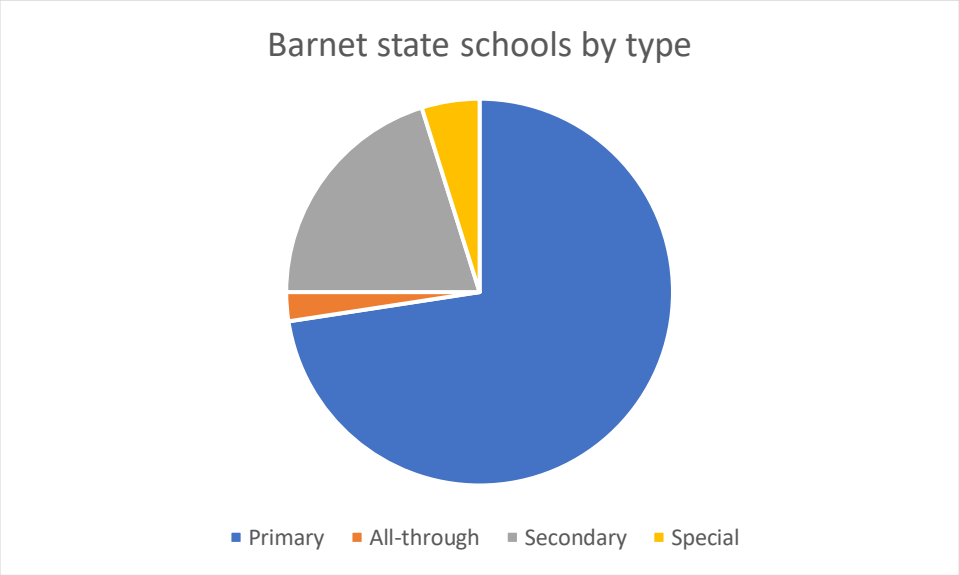

Figure 1: Summary pie chart of Barnet state schools by type

Whilst Barnet is generally an affluent borough (in comparison to London and England rates), in 2018, 12.6% of children were living in relative poverty and 10.7% of children were living in absolute poverty[9]. Deprivation levels are higher in pockets of deprivation across the borough for e.g., the Grahame Park Estate[8]. A total of 7879 school children in Barnet are in receipt of free school meals[11].

In 2019/20, ~19% of reception children in Barnet were identified as having excess weight, which was slightly lower than London (21.6%) and England (23.0%). Furthermore, ~34% of Year 6 Children in Barnet were identified as having excess weight, which was slightly lower than London (38.2%)

and England (35.2%). The 2020/21 NCMP national report highlighted obesity rates in both reception-aged and year 6 school children increasing by around 4.5 percentage points between 2019-20 and 2020-21, this is the highest annual rise since the NCMP began in 2006/07, the previous highest rise was less than 1 percentage point. Levels of underweight in Reception for Barnet was 1% and Year 6 was 2%, which were the same as London and England averages. However, for 2020/21, levels for underweight in reception had almost doubled. It is important to note that, this data is based on a nationally representative sample of 10% collected by local authorities as it was not feasible to expect a full NCMP collection due to the impact of COVID-19 on schools.

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2.2 Barnet Food Plan survey findings

In July 2022, the Barnet public health team circulated a series of Barnet food plan surveys to seek the views of Parents/Carers, school food leads and young people on school food provision & standards and on actions/activities within the upcoming Barnet food plan.

3.2.1 School leads survey

Nature of respondents

23 schools (17 primary, 4 secondary and 1 special school) responded to the school food leads survey. Most respondents did not work in a school in the most deprived areas of Barnet. When asked who led on school food provision, the two most common responses were the headteacher or catering manager. 'Headteacher' was the most popular response with 23% of respondents answering with headteacher. Only 13% of respondents had a named school governor who led on school food.

Understanding of school food standards

Most school leads (73.7%) were either confident or very confident about their understanding of the school food standards. However, when the school leads were asked about overarching principles of the school food standards, responses suggested that understanding was not consistent:

1. **The school food standards apply across the whole school day, including breakfasts, morning breaks, tuck shops and after school clubs-** 26% of respondents reported an understanding of this school food standard.
2. **As a general principle, it is important to provide a wide range of foods across the week-** 65% of respondents reported acknowledgement of this standard.
3. **Confectionary must not be served as part of a school lunch-** None of the respondents reported an understanding of this school food standard.

Whole school food & drink policy

The majority of school leads (65%) were confident in their ability to create and embed a whole school food policy. Only one respondent stated their school had no whole school food policy document, nor had one in planning. Only one school had a policy that allowed children to go offsite for food during school hours. 65% stated being a 'water only' school, where water and plain low-fat milk are the only drinks permitted.

Whole day food and drink provision

Many schools (78%) schools provided fresh drinking water throughout the day and half (52%) of the schools reported having at least one water fountain installed. Although a school food standard is to provide milk daily, only 16% of schools stated providing plain milk during school hours.

Breakfast was the most common, non-lunchtime food service provision as 78% of schools provided breakfast. Food growing opportunities and mid-morning break provision were available at approximately half (12/23) of the schools. Only one school reported operating a tuck shop and another school, reported having a vending machine. Around half (52%) of the schools reported offering food at after school clubs. Figure 2 below, displays a summary of the food service offer identified from the survey.

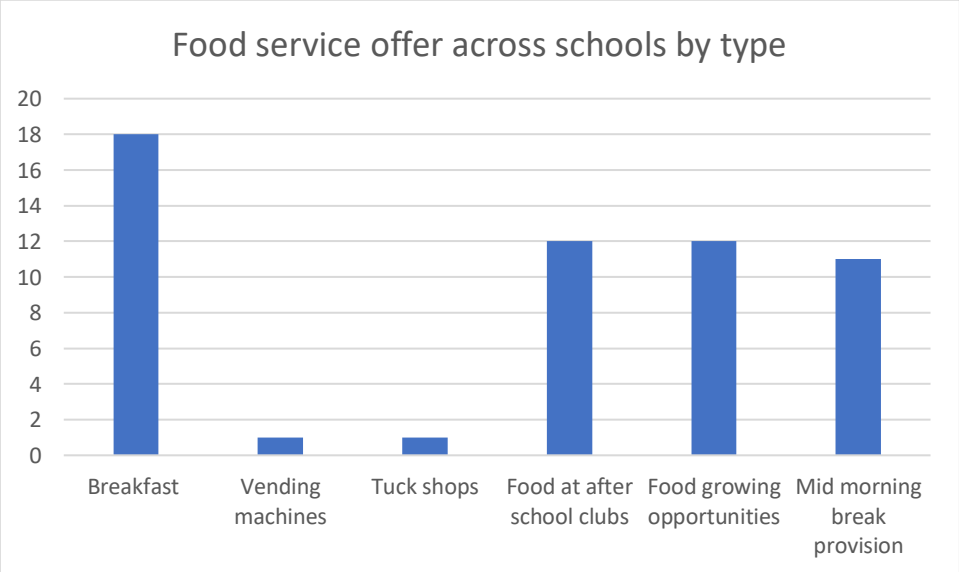


Figure 2: Summary of reported food service offer across schools

School priorities

All respondents stated that improving school food standards was a priority for their school. However, this finding should be interpreted with caution due to the risk of participation bias, as individuals who are most interested in school food could have been those most inclined to engage with the survey. Therefore, the opinions shared by those respondents are disproportionate to that of the larger population. Additionally, most school food leads reported tracking free school meal uptake, supporting children and young people to maintain a healthy weight, and working towards at least a Healthy Schools London bronze award, priorities for their school.

The survey identified that most school food leads believed that schools should lead in promoting healthier eating to children and young people, through food education and food provision. However, food education and food provision are affected by conflicting priorities and budget decisions. Other subjects are often favoured over the teaching of cooking and nutrition, and a major factor for this is the cost implications associated with food education for e.g., teaching food technology. Also, respondents highlighted the importance of acknowledging the responsibility of the family to lead in promoting healthy eating and provide healthy food.

The quality and uptake of school food

Respondents were asked to describe any barriers that make adhering to the school food standards challenging. Figure 3, the Venn diagram below illustrates the themes identified though thematic analysis. The larger the theme bubble, the related responses there were for that theme.

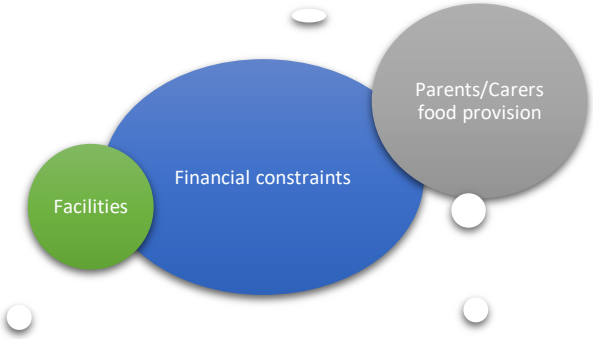


Figure 3: Thematic Venn diagram depicting school food leads reported barriers to school food standard adherence

The biggest theme identified was the impact of financial constraints on school food choices. School food leads described challenges in providing high-quality food provision due to financial constraints. This had led to a reduction in the amount of food on offer. Equally, in the secondary schools, young people have a limited budget on which to buy food, and this has led some young children to skip or limit food purchases at breaktimes (including lunchtime). Another theme identified was the impact of food provision from Parents/Carers. School food leads described observing parents providing unhealthy food in their children's packed lunches. Also, there were survey responses that highlighted children being unfamiliar with healthy foods. Two schools reported not having a functional kitchen to prepare healthy food in.

Respondents were asked to describe any concerns around students' food & drink choices inside school. Figure 4, the Venn diagram below illustrates the themes identified though thematic analysis. The larger the theme bubble, the related responses there were for that theme.

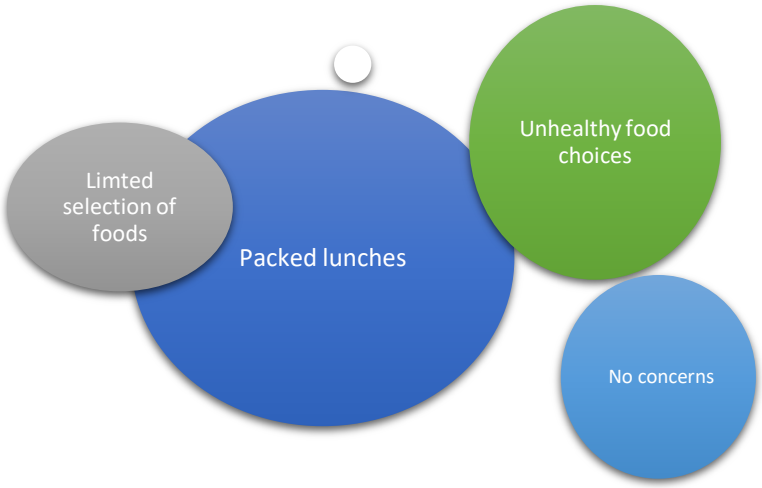


Figure 4: Thematic Venn diagram depicting school food leads concerns around student's school food & drink choices

School food leads expressed concerns (the biggest theme identified) around the nutritional quality of packed lunch food provision and found monitoring and addressing issues packed lunch provision challenging. Additionally, concerns were raised by respondents regarding a reported trend amongst students to choose unhealthy foods. To the same degree as the previous theme described, school food leads reported concern over there being a limited selection of foods available for students. For example, one respondent explained that this was because of difficulties with managing the

food provided by the catering company. This theme could also be linked to possible financial constraints. It is important to note that some respondents did not have any concerns (21%).

3.2.2 Parents/Carers survey

Nature of respondents

77 Parents/Carers with two children on average, responded to the school food survey. Most respondents were from Friern Barnet and East Finchley. 4% of respondents lived in an area of high deprivation.

School food satisfaction

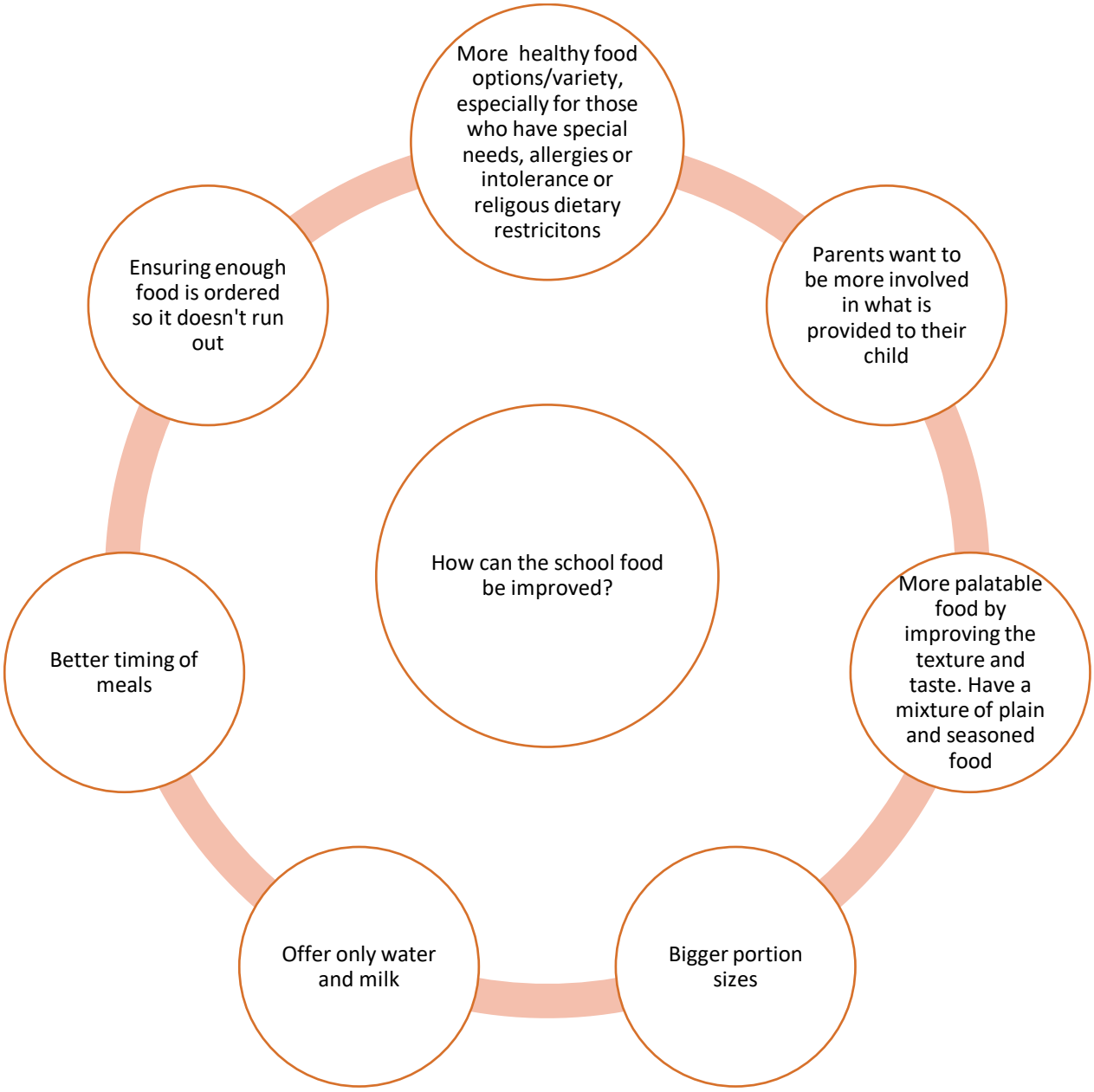
Most Parents/Carers who answered 'yes' or 'no' to agreeing that there was enough healthy food and drink options available at school, answered yes for breakfast and lunchtime provision, but not after school clubs and food offered at school events. In addition, Parents/Carers were asked how happy they were with a number of school food related factors (see Figure 5 below). On average, Parents/Carers were mostly happy with every school food related factor except food variety on offer at their child(ren)'s school.

Figure 5: Table displaying Parent/Carer satisfaction with school food related factors

School food related factor	Number of Parents/Carers who were happy' (%)	Number of Parents/Carers who were unhappy (%)
Food & drink pricing	52.6	15.8
Portion sizes	37.5	30.5
Food variety	39.4	40.9
Timing of meals	57.8	11.3
Options for those with food allergies and intolerances	33.3	11.5

Payment system	58.3	7.0
Culturally appropriate foods	31.8	7.4
Options for those who have religious dietary restrictions	20.6	11.8

Parents/Carers were asked how they would like to see their child(ren)'s school food improved. **Figure 6 below** summarises the ideas suggested by Parents/Carers to improve school food provision:



3.3.3 Young people survey

Nature of respondents

11 young people (7 females, 3 males and 1 non-binary) responded to the school food survey and only 2 young people attended the same school. The young people were from Year group 8-11 with ~50% of the young people in Year 10.

Healthy food and drink options

Most young people who answered 'yes' or 'no' to agreeing that there was enough healthy food and drink options available at school, answered yes for breakfast and lunchtime provision, but not after school clubs. There was a 50:50 split in responses regarding agreement that there was enough healthy food offered at school events. On average, 77% of young people stated that fruit and vegetables were served daily.

73% of young people reported fresh drinking water being available throughout the school day. Contrastingly, no young person reported lower fat plain milk was served daily and 9% of young people stated that lower fat plain milk was served more than once a week. 36% of young people reported that milk was never a drink option provided.

Unhealthy food and drink options

The young people respondents described that several unhealthy food items were served daily (see Figure 7 below):

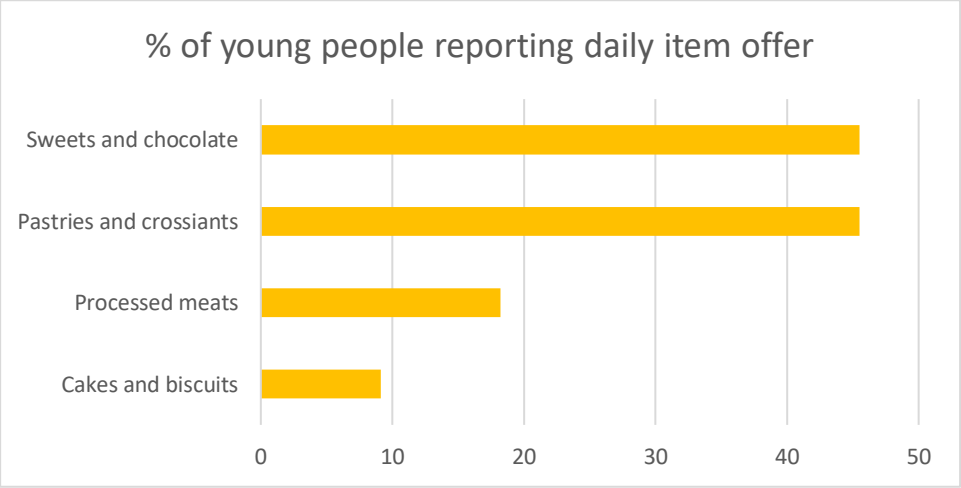


Figure 7: Frequency of daily unhealthy items as reported by young people

School food satisfaction

72% of young people expressed that they were not happy with the food and drink options at their school. Young people were asked to explain the reasons for their answer. The young people who were happy with their food and drink options (30%) explained that the food was tasty. Contrastingly, the consensus from young people for who expressed being unhappy with the food and drink was due to a lack of variety with food options. Particularly, there was a call for more multicultural food options, plant-based options, and healthier options in general.

Factors influencing food and drink choice

Respondents were asked what would make them choose more healthy food and drink at school. Figure 9 below illustrates the different factors that influenced school food and drink choice. The top three influences on food and drink choice were 1) canteen set up (queuing time, visuals & layout), 2) food quality (taste and food presentation) and 3) food variety (more healthy options and plant-based options).

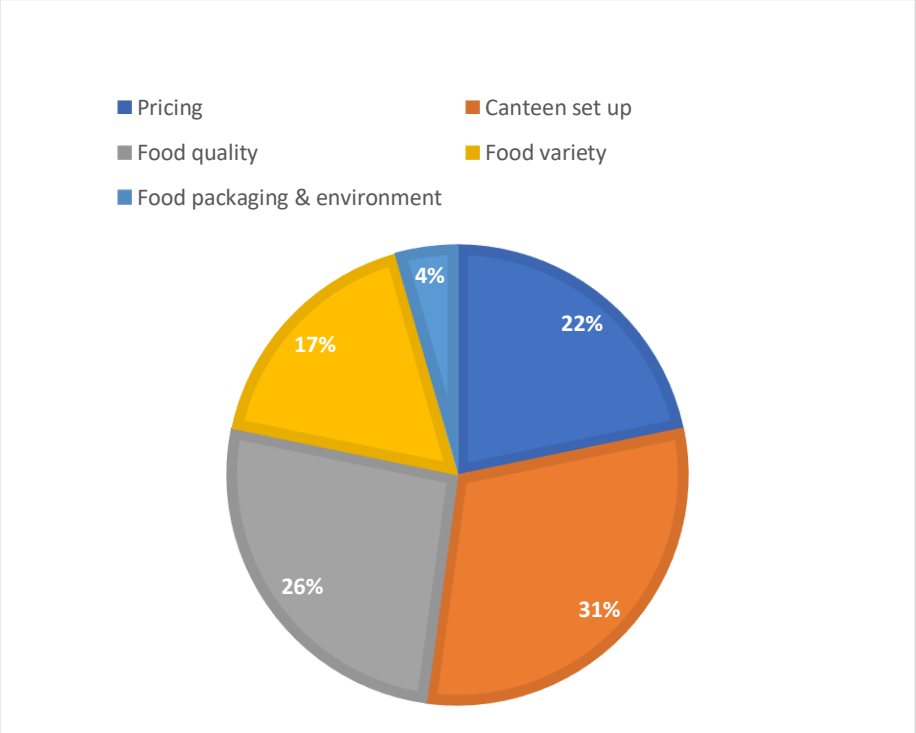
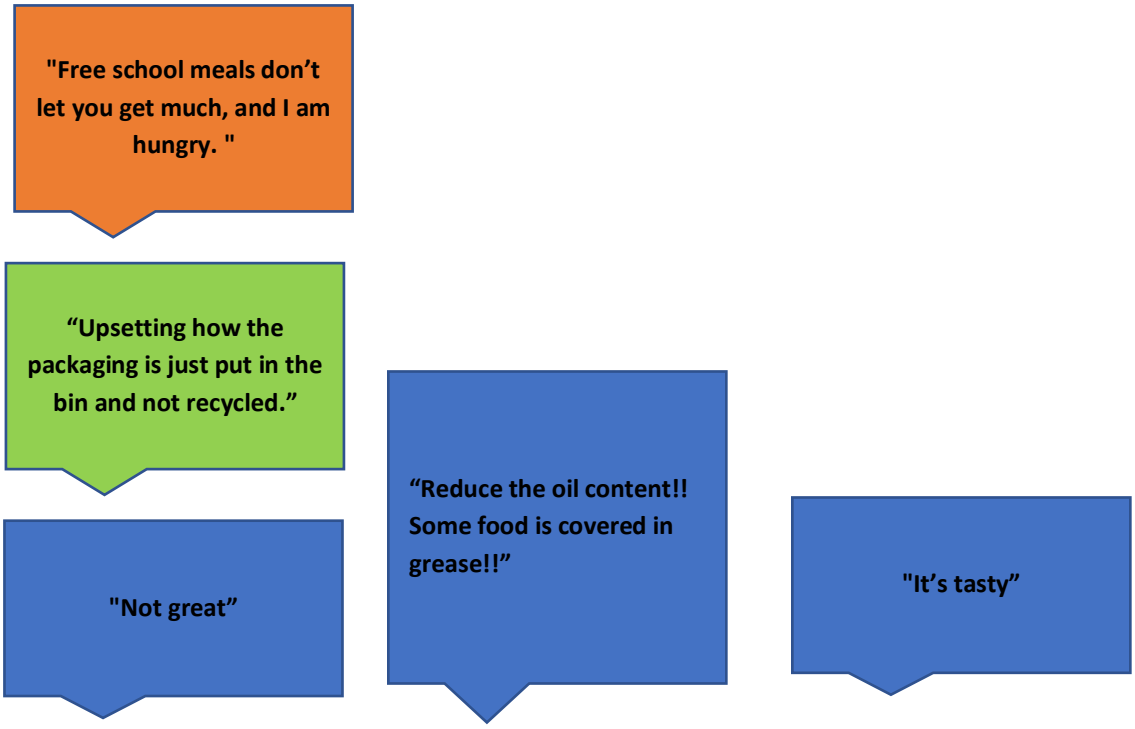


Figure 8: Factors influencing young people's school food choices

Young people were asked if they had any other comments about school food. Quotes from the survey respondents are provided below:

"I would like more water fountains rather than places you can refill your bottle so I can drink

"Schools should provide more portion sizes for students, not only teachers because I think most schools give teachers more



Four themes were identified from the above responses and include:

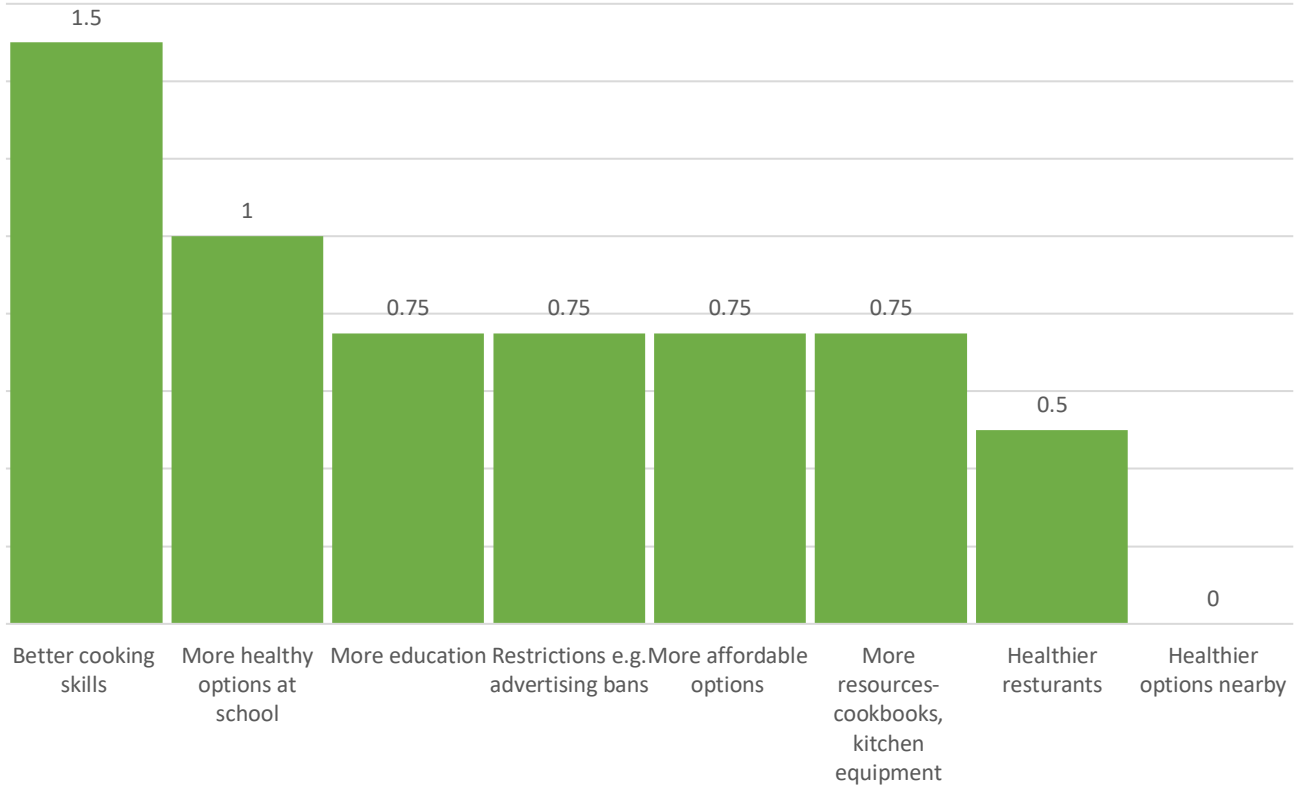
- Issues with the portion size not being too small- An important observation was made by one of the young people, whereby the portion sizes for the younger children is the same portion for the older children, but teachers at lunchtime got more food.
- Food quality- One student found their school food tasty but in contrast two other respondents were unhappy with the quality of the food.
- Water accessibility- One student wanted water to be more accessible so that it was possible to drink without needing a water bottle.
- Lack of environmental concern- One young person expressed upset due to observing food packaging being thrown in the bin and not recycled.

2.3 Youth board engagement session

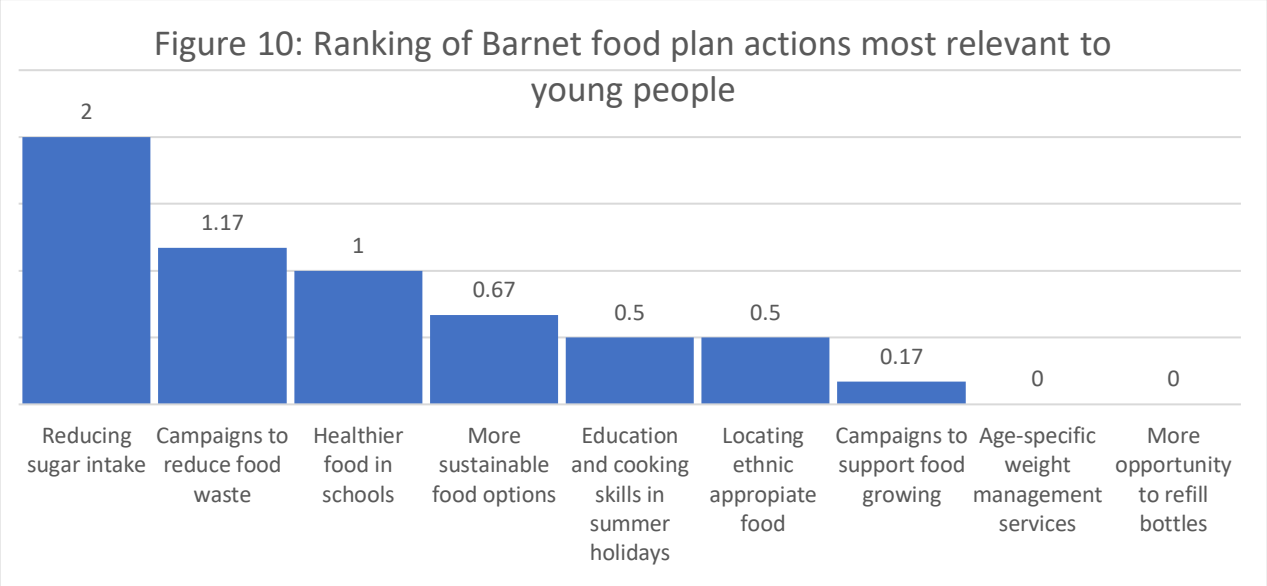
In July 2022, the CYP public health team co-facilitated an online youth board engagement session which focused on food and health, to develop the Barnet food plan and the school food standards project. There were 8 young people virtually in attendance. Slido, an audience interaction software package was used. Additionally, the group were asked several open-ended questions that they could answer verbally or use the Microsoft teams chat function.

The young people were asked what would help them to make healthy food choices and ranked a list of ideas in order of preference. Out of 8 options, more healthy food and drink options in school was ranked second (see Figure 9 below).

Figure 9: Ideas to support healthy eating ranked by young people



Similarly, when asked what actions within the Barnet Food plan would be of most use to young people, 'healthier food in schools' was ranked in the top 3 actions (see Figure 10 below).



The young people were asked about what actions they would like to see in the Barnet food plan. The following suggestions in relation to school food were made:

"Stop letting schools use sneaky techniques to make us buy unhealthy food by offering them near the tills! "

"The introduction of more options and variety of food for people with dietary restrictions mainly in schools "

"There shouldn't be sugary waffles and similar items for breakfast at school"

The suggestions made infer that young people want to see more food options, especially for those with dietary restrictions and less promotion and provision of unhealthy food within school.

2.4 Stakeholder interviews

A series of interviews with local promoters of better school food and those who support schools to adhere to the school food standards was conducted. Three interviews in total took place with representatives from the Health Education Partnership who are commissioned to run Healthy Schools London Barnet, ISS caterers who are the main catering provider for Barnet council, and the CYP public health team.

Interviewees were asked to give their professional opinion of the challenges to better local school food provision and potential opportunities that exist which can be used to enhance school food. The most reported challenges were the following:

1. **Awareness of the school food standards across the whole school day-** Schools often focus on ensuring lunch meets the school food standards but the same attention is not always given to the food provided at breakfast, after-school clubs, and breaktimes.
2. **Parent dissatisfaction with portion sizes (reported as too small)**- This could be linked to a misunderstanding of age-appropriate portion sizes and/or a greater reliance on the school meal due to food insecurity. However, it is hard to determine if the portion sizes currently being provided are indeed too small.
3. **Food insecurity-** Parents who are not eligible for free school meals may not be able to pay for school lunches for their children. Especially if they have more than one child in school. Also, families who are food insecure will have a limited budget and choose to provide food for packed lunches that they feel will fill their children up, which often are highly processed foods.
4. **Budget constraints reducing standards and quality**- Some schools might be ordering less food and of lower nutritional quality food to stretch the food provision on offer. Schools may be using leftover restricted lunch items for breakfast and after-school clubs.
5. **Ensuring the quality of food provision when different contracts are providing food across the school day-** Having multiple food contracts, makes quality assurance and effective management of the contracts more difficult.

Interviewees were asked to give their professional opinion of what opportunities could be used to better local school food provision. The most reported opportunities were the following:

1. **The SMILE project**- the aims and objectives of this targeted project link well to supporting school food provision, nutrition education and improving the school food environment.
2. **Young people are requesting more plant-based options-** This could allow an opportunity for introduce more vegetables, including plant-based proteins into the menu.
3. **Healthy Schools London-** The programme supports a better understanding of school food standards and guidance on how to meet the standards.
4. **Catering staff training-** Developing staff could help improve the variety of food provided and accuracy of portion sizes. Financial savings for the school could also be made if more recipes can be made from scratch and uses low-cost items such as beans and lentils.

3. Learning from best practice

3.1 Rapid literature review

A rapid literature review (see Figure 11 below) of academic research, grey literature, reports, and guidance documents was conducted to identify best practice for improving school food provision.

Figure 11: Summary of findings

The national school food plan (2013)-Department for Education

The national school food plan[12] outlines 5 key actions for consideration by schools to improve school food provision. These actions are: **1)** Embed a whole school approach (including parent & pupil input); **2)** Practice effective leadership (across headteachers, governors and catering managers); **3)** Review the school food environment. Evidence suggests a school's physical environment does impact on healthy-eating outcomes[13]; 4) Champion good food quality; 5) Improve school meal uptake; evidence suggests that young people who have school lunches have better quality diets overall[14].

Spill the beans campaign report (2021)-Biteback

In 2021, the charity Biteback[15] gathered the views of 12-18 year olds on school food through a series of focus groups. From the research, 12 recommendations were detailed for schools and caterers to prioritise: **1)**Stick to the school food standards, **2)** Consult with pupils **3)** Ensure there are enough vegan & vegetarian options on offer and **4)** have plant-based days twice a week; **5)** providing catering training will help to ensure better plant-based options are available. **6)** Make the canteen a health-promoting and comfortable place to eat by putting healthy options in plain sight and **7)** through canteen re-design. **8)** Adapt measures to encourage young people to want to stay on site and have school meals. **9)** Provide free drinking water & **10)** two portions of vegetables daily. **11)** Publish menus with pricing on the school website and **12)** have a crisis-response to manage school food during emergenices.

The Croydon school food plan (2015)

The school food plan[16] has 4 key priorities: **1)** Children eat healthy breakfasts and lunches, **2)** Children & parents know how to grow and cook healthy food**, 3)** A whole school approach is taken to healthy eating and inspiring a love of food, **4)** "What works well" is shared amongst schools. The plan emphasises partnership working, headteachers leading the change and provided a headteachers checklist & breakfast menu template. The plan consisted of a universal offer, flagship & targeted schools.

The Waltham Forest school food audit report (2019)

A pilot review[17] of School Food Standards in 18 Primary and Secondary schools took place in Waltham Forest. Examples of recommendations were provided for the Waltham Forest council's public health team: **1)** Oily fish at least once a week on the menu cycle was not adhered to by all providers; **2)** The audit found that vegetarian sources of protein were poorly understood by some providers and vegetarian options were sometimes not given as much priority/thought as main meals.

3.2 Case studies

Four local educational settings were identified as best practice examples of school food provision and used as case studies. The case studies illustrated in Figure 12 below, summarises the activity within the settings and thematic analysis has been performed to identify any actions and approaches that would be useful to feature in the support plan.

Figure 12: Local school case studies from Underhill primary, The Totteridge Academy, Saracens high school and Goldbeaters primary school

Underhill primary

- The school took part in the School Meals Initiative for Learning Healthy Eating project in 2019. The school rolled out health-promoting SMILE trays and a series of nutrition talks took place across the duration of the project. The school as part of the project changed their menu and reduced their sweet pudding from everyday to once a week.

Totteridge Academy

- The school are next to a farm managed by the charity GROW. As part of the partnership with GROW, the school receive fresh produce for the canteen on a regular basis. Additionally, pupils at the school can take part in several food growing experiences and programmes for e.g. the mushroom academy.

Saracens high school

- The school has well-designed canteen and healthy eating messages are displayed across the school. The school has well presented food and offer the chance for families to come in and enjoy the school food. Packed lunches are banned by the school.

Goldbeaters primary

- The school took part in the School Meals Initiative for Learning Healthy Eating project in 2021. The school rolled out health-promoting SMILE trays and a series of nutrition talks took place across the duration of the project. The school as part of the project updated their menu and put healthy eating on the agenda for their parents coffee mornings.

Themes identified

-Food growing

-Local food produce used in school meals

-Promotion of school meals

-Canteen design

-Engagement in food education projects

-Whole School Approach

4. Discussion and Next Steps

4.1 Themes identified

Multiple themes (six in total) were identified from the research conducted:

Knowledge and upskilling	Gaps in school food provision	Environmental aspects
• School food leads appeared to have a gap in school food standard knowledge. Especially in regard to understanding that the standards apply across whole school day, and confectionary should not be provided at lunchtime. • Both Young People and Parents/Carers and Catering staff would benefit from support in understanding age-appropriate portion sizes and a refresher on healthy eating in general. • Catering staff would benefit from routine training opportunities, particularly in enhancing their cooking skills to make plant based dishes and more varied and multicultural dishes. • Providing training and upskilling opportunities is a best practice recommendation.	• Most school food leads reported that they were a 'water only' school where water and plain low-fat milk are the only drinks permitted. However, schools did not appear to be meeting the school food standard of providing plain milk daily. This contradiction requires further investigation. Also, parents suggested schools offer water and milk only as an improvement to school food provision. The responses from the survey particularly from Parents/Carers suggest that school food standards are not being upheld across the school day, especially at non-lunchtime mealtime provision including school events. • Secondary schools appear most likely to be in non-adherence to the school food standards. Providing tailored support to secondary schools is a best practice recommendation. • The findings suggest schools are over-using restricted items such as processed meats and meat alternatives. • Young People have reported that sugary foods frequently featur on the menu, especially at non-lunchtime mealtimes.	• The canteen set up was reported to be one of the top 3 factors influencing food choice at school. High quality, health-promoting canteen design is a best practice recommendation. • Also, some young people reported disatisfaction with the lack of effort made by their school to consider sustainability and the environment when making decisions on packaging type and general food and packaging wastage. • A small proportion of school food leads explained that kitchen facilities significantly impacted on their food provision. • Food growing was a common example of best practice and encouraging food growing in schools is recommended.

Cost of living/budget constraints	Leaders driving the change	School food satisfaction
•School food leads highlighted issues with budgeting for school food. Although, school food was unaminously reported to be a priority for schools, the budget for food and food education including food technology as part of the curriculum, was also reported to be negatively affected by other conflicting priorities. • Most school food leads reported that overall, Parents/Carers brought in unhealthy packed lunches. •Parents/Carers themselves arelikely to be struggling with food budget constraints and therefore selecting food of lower nutritional quality due to cost. •Responses infer that young people are the most directly affected by food and drink pricing at their school. 52.6% of Parents/Carers reported that they were happy with food & drink pricing at their child's school. Young people were reported to skip or limit food purchases at breaktimes (including lunchtime) due to budget constraints. •Improving school meal uptake (including free school meals) is a best practice recommendation. •Portion sizes may be deliberately smaller then they should be in some schools to stretch food budgets.	•Councils can play a postive role in offering support with school food to schools for e.g. Flagship schools in Croydon. Incentivsation for good practice is likely to be required to motivate good practice. •The monitoring of school food practices is a best practice recommendation and school leadership needs to be on board. • Headteachers are key to driving the change in school food. • It is best practice for schools to join an healthy schools accrediation scheme. Also school food leads should seek advice from a nutrition professional; especially for support with contract management and even more so if the school provides catering in-house. •Most school food leads reported that monitoring and addressing unhealthy packed lunches with Parents/Carers was a challenge and a large barrier to children eating healthily in school. It is important that schools are supported to manage packed lunches effectively and equally that Parents/Carers also become leaders in postive change.	•Parents/Carers and Young people responses indicate that there are not enough healthy food options across the school day and also at school events. Also, both reported a disatisfaction with school food food regarding quality, variety and portion size. The variety was explained as limited and largely unaccomodating for pupils with dietary restrictions (vegan, religous, allergies etc.). Also, Parents/Carers also wanted neurodiversity and palability to be taken more into consideration for e.g. be more considerate of textures and seasonings in food preperation. •Young people requested more plant based options on the menu and some parents expressed wanting pupils to be able to make food choices based on animal welfare grounds. Having more plant based options could help mitigate school food budget constraints. • Parents/Carers requested better timing of meals. This finding would benefit from further investigation by schools into what timings would be preffered. • Young People and Parents/Carers want more involvment with school food. This is a best practice recommendation.

4.2 Next steps

- To use the findings of the report to feed into the development of the school food support plan which will help to support schools with improving the school food experience and provision.
- To collaborate with other relevant stakeholders to formulate a school food support plan that is agreed upon by all and is likely to contain external actions from such stakeholders alongside internally agreed actions within the Start & Grow Well Public Health team.

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