

CASE STUDY - SCHOOL MEALS

An award winning partnership project with NHS Knowsley and Knowsley Council

Public Health teams have a long history of working in partnership to achieve better health. One example of recent partnership working with Local Government colleagues is an award winning school meals project between NHS Knowsley and Knowsley Council.



Background

Knowsley Council's Commercial Services Team provides school meals and building cleaning services to all local schools. The School Meals Service prepares and produces fresh hot and cold meals for each of the borough's 63 schools.

The service provides nearly a million lunchtime meals per year; with further breakfast and nursery services in selected schools.

The School Meals Service has a workforce of some 365 employees managed and led by a small management team and support staff.

Knowsley has a high proportion of free school meals therefore ensuring that the pupils take up their nutritionally balanced meal is a priority for the service.

A key improvement area for Knowsley in 2010/11 was to increase school meal uptake (NI 52) across both primary and secondary sectors.

What was done?

There has been a real focus within the service on improving the factors that contribute to the customer experience. This has included a greater emphasis on staff training, with more staff working towards NVQ qualifications as well as training in health and food safety. Investing in staff is a key aspect of the service's strategic approach to improving the offer to children and young people. This recognises that it is staff that interacts with and effectively sells the food to the pupils on a daily basis.

Stakeholder engagement has also improved with the service obtaining feedback through a variety of means. This includes survey questionnaires to the pupils, feedback from the 'My School Lunch' web site, engagement with school councils, communicating with parents and working with Headteachers and Governors. Engaging with these stakeholders gives a clearer picture of the customer needs and the issues faced so changes can be made to enhance standards whilst

meeting those needs. An example of this increased engagement was the Free School Meals Week initiative that enabled all primary and special school pupils to experience school meals free of charge for a whole week. Parents were also encouraged to participate and were given the opportunity to have a free meal with their child; this initiative was supported by Head teachers, parents and governors. The Free School Meals Week was particularly successful as the service and the schools jointly promoted it as a whole school initiative.

In recent years the proportion of food provided by local suppliers has also increased and some food is grown in allotments by the children themselves. Whilst this not only improves the food freshness and quality, by using local suppliers, it can have a positive impact on the economic effects for the wider area. The service also actively supports and offers fair trade products and produce in all schools.

The service, in conjunction with the Public Health team at NHS Knowsley, head teachers and governors, has also removed all confectionery and carbonated drinks from every school in the borough and reduced the amount of pre-prepared foods used in its school meals. Public Health teams have provided valuable guidance around the nutritional content of food.

Following investment in 2008/09 all schools now have full production kitchens with fully trained and qualified chefs who prepare the meals each day on site.

What were the results?

Improvements across both free and paid meal uptake were evident and higher than any other local authority provider in the country.

	2009/10		2010/11
Primary Uptake	45.5%	⇒	50.6%
Secondary Uptake	45.1%	⇒	54.2%
Overall Uptake	45.4%	⇒	51.8%

(Please put above in a table)

As the figures indicate the major improvement has been seen in the secondary sector. This impact is largely due to the different meal service offer that is now provided at the seven new Centres for Learning, under the Building Schools for the Future scheme. These new learning environments include radically transformed kitchen and dining facilities that provide both formal and informal dining areas and multiple service points across each of the sites. This has improved both the quality of the food and the dining experience for pupils and staff.

The school meals service is now accredited with the Investors in People Standard and is working towards ISO: 9001 accreditation.

Critical Success Factors

- Senior Management, elected member and governor commitment (in schools and within the Local Authority);
- Significant investment in quality training for all staff;
- Clear policy guidelines provided by School Food Trust;
- Engagement with pupils, staff and parents around menu planning; and
- Excellent partnership working with schools and Public Health.

What could be done differently?

- More direct engagement with young people and parents;
- Potential redesign of the dining and serving areas;
- Introducing options for different payment methods including on-line payments for parents;
- Communications for future menus and service changes.

All of these issues were identified in the market research as being important to encouraging more young people to enjoy a healthy and nutritious school meal which the service will be focusing during 2012.

Looking to the future

The service is aiming to build on the improvements made to date and is currently working with a marketing company to aid the positive promotion of the School Meals Service with a focus on both the dining experience and the related wellbeing benefits of a healthy diet.

The service is also working with each school in the borough to help tailor individual menus based on the preferences of pupils (within the nutritional guidelines) and the fresh seasonal produce available. Schools will also be encouraged to run a variety of specialised menus based on events throughout the year such as Christmas, Halloween and Chinese New Year to name a few.

Since the beginning of 2011/12 the service has been utilising the Saffron stock control system. Therefore an area of focus is driving the associated benefits that increased performance management information can provide such as management and reductions in food waste, increased staff productivity and real time management information that will enable the service to change and adapt to current trends and economic/environmental factors.



For more information

Contact Robbie Bannister, Operations Manager, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

robbie.bannister@knowsley.gov.uk

0151 443 2454