

Leeds School Meals Strategy



Transforming school food and drink in partnership

The Leeds Free School Meal Research Project: Key findings from Phase 2

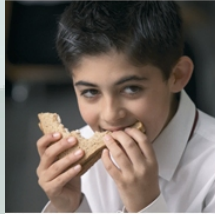
P. Sahota, S. Bowyer, J. Woodward

December 2008

Key findings

- Today:
 - Making change happen
 - Stigma
 - Interventions – implementation and effectiveness
 - Perceptions of school meals
 - Conclusion

Leeds School Meals Strategy



Transforming school food and drink in partnership

Making change happen

Making change happen in schools

Awareness

- Before project, most pilot schools were not aware there was an issue with fsm uptake

Why?

- Lack of monitoring
- Lack of information
 - In primary schools administrators knew who was entitled and who did / did not take. Therefore, know uptake.
 - In secondary schools, information split. Administrators have entitlement data, caterers have school meal numbers. No central point.

A structure for change

Project leads

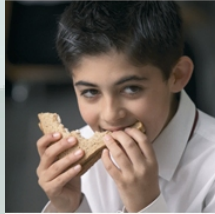
- Their role critical – providing co-ordination and momentum
- Need authority (deputy head-teachers?)
- Strong links to Healthy School Co-ordinator role
- Need capacity i.e. time away from teaching (often not case for HSC)
- Need support (administrators, catering team)

A structure for change cont.

Working party

- Successful structure including administration, catering, teaching
- An “inclusive” approach led to more cross-department interventions
- Hierarchical approach led to less cross-department collaboration
- Needed to be willing to reflect on current situation and make changes where necessary
- Limited evidence of Whole School Food approach

Leeds School Meals Strategy



Transforming school food and drink in partnership

Stigma

Is it an issue?

- Identified as a significant factor by CPAG
 - Phase 1 found some evidence, but limited
- Is obtaining a free school meal in school obvious?
 - Primary schools:
 - Low visibility of entitlement. Parents normally pay in school office.
 - Exceptions – when money collected in class or school trips.
 - Secondary schools:
 - Cash based cafeterias – high visibility of entitlement (list of names at till)
 - Cashless systems – not visible
- Parental survey
 - Parents said they and their children less comfortable claiming for a free school meal in secondary schools:
 - Primary – 78% felt comfortable. Secondary – 63% felt comfortable.

Is it an issue? Cont.

- School generally thought stigma not an issue
 - Exception was one school that conducted a survey into name-calling. Found having a fsm was a trigger.
- What did pupils entitled to a fsm say? (secondary only)
 - Majority felt comfortable claiming for a fsm (75% pre, 78% post)
 - Majority said not embarrassed to claim (66% pre, 70% post)
 - Majority did not think they would be teased (80% pre, 74% post)
 - **BUT**, means 9% did not feel comfortable, 17% did feel embarrassed and 10% were worried about being teased.
 - In one school – 18% were worried about being teased (compared to 4% in most others)
 - Every Child Matters?

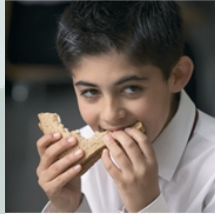
Do cashless system help?

Impact positive but not definitive

- School with best results (least amount of embarrassment and most feeling comfortable) had a cashless system
 - Improved over the intervention period.
 - Possibly interventions + atmosphere + minimal visibility.
- School with worst results had poorly operated cashless system
- Possible to have low levels of worries about teasing and cash based system

- Cashless?
 - Not automatic solution but if well operated and supported by interventions to maximise awareness – offers greatest potential

Leeds School Meals Strategy



Transforming school food and drink in partnership

The Interventions

Implementation

- Assemblies & lessons:
 - Held in nearly all schools – felt to be successful
 - Variety of executions (often innovative)
- Postcards, letters, posters:
 - Featured named contact plus showed pupils what they could get for the fsm allowance amount
 - Used by all schools – felt useful, but not substitute for personal contact
- Adapting anti-bullying policy:
 - Some schools less willing to do.
 - Did not feel claiming for fsm was a reason for bullying or did not name reasons for bullying in policy

Implementation cont.

- Making obtaining a fsm less visible:
 - Some successes e.g. changing how money collected / how packed lunches supplied for school trips. In primary schools
 - Less straightforward in secondary schools with cash cafeterias – no method that ensures anonymity
- Other successful interventions (free school meal specific):
 - Bullying survey – revealed name-calling as an issue. Changes then made.
 - Targeted communication (entitled pupils but not taking). Some pupils switched.
 - “School Meal Dinner Inspectors”. Packed lunch pupils feedback on school dinners. Some switched, plus useful feedback.

Implementation cont.

- Other successful interventions (general school meal)
 - Captain / Golden tables. Pupils rewarded for good behaviour by sitting on special table. Allowed them to try school dinners.
 - Demonstrating food to parents – helped counter misconceptions

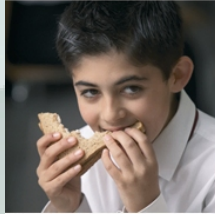
The effect of the interventions

- In terms of increasing uptake, the affect was limited
- Some improvements (in 2 secondary, 2 primary) but not dramatic

Why?

- A lack of time?
 - Interventions still taking place in Autumn 2008 – others in summer term. Very little time for any awareness or attitude changes to be translated into behaviour change.
- One-off interventions?
 - Drip, drip effect needed
- Or, because interventions only tackled free school meal specific issues. What about factors affecting school meals in general?

Leeds School Meals Strategy



Transforming school food and drink in partnership

Perception of school meals

From pupil questionnaires

- Many issues with school meal provision arose (some examples below)
- In primary schools:
 - Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ said there was not enough choice of food
 - Nearly $\frac{2}{3}$ said portion sizes were too small
 - Over a third still hungry after school lunch (an additional $\frac{1}{3}$ were sometimes)
 - More half said there were long queues
 - Half said dining room was messy
 - Over 80% that it was very noisy

From pupil questionnaires cont.

- In secondary schools most important factors related to lunch-time environment:
 - Over 90% said there were long queues
 - Over 80% said dining room was over-crowded
 - Nearly 90% said dining room was very noisy
 - Nearly half said there was not enough time to eat
 - Only a third said the food tasted good
- Much dissatisfaction amongst pupils
- Very similar results – whether or not the pupils were receiving their meal for free

Critical issues

- Lunch-time experience poor (particularly in secondary schools)
 - Short lunch-break (35 minutes)
 - Late lunch-break (e.g. at 1.15pm when school starts at 8.30). FSM allowance can only be redeemed at lunch.
 - Dining rooms too small
 - Preventing obesity guidelines – social, sitting, slowly. Not possible in many schools
- Pupils have high expectations – used to eating out
 - Big gap between their expectations and provision
 - Lack opportunities to feedback
 - Over 50% of secondary school pupils said they did not get a chance to say what they thought about the food
 - Options are therefore going out for lunch (if allowed) or a packed lunch

Conclusion

- Interventions to improve the uptake of fsm are feasible
- Range of interventions developed with the schools, tested and evaluated well
- Often thought stigma does not exist – but a minority of pupils do not feel comfortable claiming
- Cashless systems can help reduce visibility of obtaining a free school meal

But problems are larger than this.... There is a need to improve school meals in general to affect free school meal uptake.

- Improvements in food provided needed
- Improvements in lunch-time environment (needs to be valued by schools)
- Pupils need to be able to feedback
- Whole School Food approach still at very early stages