

# THE DINING ROOM ENVIRONMENT

## Introduction

Teaching and learning doesn't stop at lunchtime. A pleasant and social dining room for pupils and staff can help make lunchtime a positive experience. The design of the dining room is vital to the way it functions – pupil access, queuing, the way food is served and paid for and the system for clearing up should be carefully thought through. Involving pupils, teaching staff, catering staff and other dining room users in improvements and modifications leads to a sense of ownership and this process can be led by your School Nutrition Action Group.

Below you will find some ideas that might help you get started and working on 'Creating a Culture and Ethos of Healthy Eating' as outlined by Ofsted.

## Reducing Noise

- Placing of small rubber pads at the bottom of chair legs to stop the scraping/dragging noise.
- Playing instrumental background music.
- Improving sound absorption by using special materials on the walls like cork boards or egg boxes behind pictures/murals on walls.
- Rewarding quiet tables / pupils monitored by the lunchtime staff.
- Enabling the school council to develop dining room etiquette / behaviour statements – for example, 'quiet voices will be used whilst in the dining hall'.
- Recruiting and training pupil lunchtime monitors to manage the noise and behaviour and help younger children with table manners.
- Introduction of a family service.
- Training of lunchtime supervisors.
- Teachers having lunch with children (perhaps introduce a rota system).

## Reducing the length of queuing time

- Implement a phased or 'split' lunchtime?
- Send menus out in advance and have a pre-order option – use coloured bands for pupil's choices?
- Have more than one service counter? If possible, consider cost, staffing and space.
- Set up healthy vending machines? Make sure foods meeting the school food regulations.
- Employ a cashless system? Check carefully the type of system is appropriate and cost effective to manage

## Promoting healthier options

- Reward schemes where pupils/staff can earn points for selecting particular items, for example the class with the most tokens at the end of the week gets a reward.
- Introduction of 'meal deal' options.

## Rewarding good behaviour

- Having a special table once a week where pupils get served their lunch at the table.
- Introduction of a golden spoon which is handed out on a weekly basis in assemblies – the golden spoon is awarded to pupils who have been extremely well behaved or have consistently tried new foods on offer.
- Using stickers as rewards.

## Dining room image

- Coloured tablecloths to brighten up the dining room.
- Pictures/murals on the wall created by pupils, staff and parents.
- Balanced eating messages/poster displays around dining room.
- Naming the dining room and getting the pupils involved with designing a logo. Use the logo on menus and displays.
- Developing an exciting menus board and/ or have small menus on the tables.
- Consider lighting and heating.

## Positive interaction

- The pupils are the customers in the dining hall therefore they should be treated well. A smile and verbal communication will help to engage pupils while making lunchtime choices.
- Let the children sit where they like regardless of their type of lunch. Otherwise children may choose to have a packed lunch to sit with their friends. Children having a packed lunch will not become familiar with school lunches if they sit separately.
- Midday supervisors should encourage good behaviour and a calm and pleasant dining environment.
- Set up 'happy lunchtime helpers': pupil helpers to encourage younger children to eat their lunch and keep them company if they are slow eaters and their friends have left.
- Many schools encourage teachers to eat their lunch in the dining room and report many benefits such as a calmer atmosphere as well as better interaction between staff and pupils.

## For further information and guidance you can visit the following websites:

- What works well on the School Food plan has a number of case studies on schools which changed their dining room environment:  
<http://whatworkswell.schoolfoodplan.com/articles/category/2/the-lunchtime-experience>.
- As lunchtime supervisors and kitchen staff are an integral part of the lunchtime experience and their skills, knowledge and attitude can make or break lunchtime experiences, Food for Life Partnership has developed training for catering staff and lunchtime supervisors. The School Food Plan recognises the importance of the school workforce and has developed, with LACA, school workforce development standards, including standards for midday supervisors.  
[www.laca.co.uk/news/professional-standards-school-food-workforce-launched-laca-chair-carrienne-bishop-main-event](http://www.laca.co.uk/news/professional-standards-school-food-workforce-launched-laca-chair-carrienne-bishop-main-event)