

HEALTHY SCHOOLS FOR WALES

Governor and Parent Involvement in Health Promotion

Implementing food policies in schools



**Hybu
Iechyd
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Wales

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INTRODUCTION

Governors, parents, teachers and pupils working as partners can have a positive influence on the healthy lifestyles of present and future generations. In cooperation, they may encourage and reinforce positive behaviour patterns.

Probably the most significant contribution from the partnership will be the development and constant review of school health policies which, ideally, are written by and for the community of the school.

This booklet will show why a food policy is an essential part of an overall health policy. There is now clear evidence that the diets of school children are far from ideal (page 5). Suggested changes to eating habits, with reasons, are outlined on

page 6 and the remainder of the booklet is a guide to writing a policy and putting it into action. Some sources of help are listed on page 16.

Health Promotion Wales would be pleased to receive any comments you may have on this document. Please direct correspondence to the Director of Education and Training.

THE HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOL

Health is promoted in schools in many different ways; it is part of the school ethos, it is reflected in day to day relationships, in rules, services and facilities as well as in the taught curriculum.

Developing healthy lifestyles and encouraging informed decision making are important to school health education. All time spent at school contributes to the lifestyle patterns which young people adopt. It is important that teachers, parents and governors encourage and enable young people to choose positive and healthy lifestyles.

Governors can help to establish the principle that what is taught in the classroom ought to be consistent with other activities in the school. Information and understanding gained within the classroom can either be reinforced and supported,

or completely undermined by what happens outside the classroom.

It is good practice for every school to adopt and implement a food policy as part of an overall policy on health education. This should cover classroom teaching about nutrition, provision of healthy food choices on the school premises and encouraging healthy eating behaviour.

A good policy aims to ensure a consistent approach to food across the whole school environment.

WHAT ARE CHILDREN EATING NOW?

The report *Diet and Young People in Wales 1986-1992* (HPW, 1993)

points out that the dietary habits of adults in Wales have improved in recent years and it is 'somewhat disappointing' that there does not appear to be a similar trend among adolescents.

- International comparisons show that Welsh children are among the highest consumers of snack foods which are often high in fat, sugar and/or salt.
- From 1986-1992 there was an increase in the proportion of Welsh children reporting to consume snacks such as chocolate, crisps, peanuts, cakes and biscuits three or four times a day from 28 per cent to 40 per cent for boys and from 21 per cent to 27 per cent for girls.
- In 1993 59 per cent of five year old children in Wales had experienced dental decay.
- Consumption of fruit by young people in Wales is low by international standards.
- Meal patterns among adolescents have changed. In 1986 76 per cent of boys and 62 per cent of girls in the 11-16 age group said they had breakfast daily. In 1992 the proportions had fallen to 71 per cent and 53 per cent respectively.
- Missing meals was more common among girls than boys and the frequency increases with age. In 1992 56 per cent of girls aged 15-16 said they did not have breakfast every day, 31 per cent daily missed out lunch and 17 per cent skipped the evening meal.

WHAT IS HEALTHY EATING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The government's dietary guidelines are to:

Eat more

fruit and vegetables
starchy foods (bread,
cereals, potatoes)

and cut down on

fatty and sugary foods.

- Eating more fruit, vegetables and starchy foods means increased consumption of nearly all vitamins and minerals.
- Fruit, vegetables and starchy foods contain fibre and can protect against bowel problems and they are filling without providing too many calories.
- Too much fat, particularly fat from animal sources, is linked with coronary heart disease in later life.
- Sugar provides calories only and no proteins, vitamins or minerals.

Too much sugar is a major cause of dental decay in children.

In addition, some people are sensitive to salt and high intakes can lead to increased blood pressure which, in turn, may lead to heart disease or stroke.

Eating well in childhood is important for three reasons:

- Children need food which meets their requirements for optimum growth and development.
- Health related behaviours and attitudes towards food and eating are established in childhood.
- While the early establishment of poor eating habits is related to some diseases which appear in childhood they can also contribute to diseases appearing in adult life.

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL - FORMULATING A FOOD POLICY

WHY IS A FOOD POLICY IMPORTANT?

Nutrition is an essential part of health education, and opportunities for nutrition teaching exist within the national curriculum and in the discretionary time available to schools. A food policy provides an effective means of ensuring that the food choices available throughout the school serve to reinforce the nutritional messages taught in class. A written policy also means that everyone knows what is expected and what they are working towards.

WHAT SHOULD A POLICY COVER?

A school policy on food needs to consider formal lessons, school meals, vending machines and tuck shop provision and could include advice on packed lunches and other food brought from home. A food policy can make pupils and staff

more aware of the nutritional value of the food on offer. The policy should also aim to ensure that the healthier options are attractive and are not more expensive.

The policy should also recognise that it may be possible to influence eating habits outside school. The problem of meal skipping is common among young people and seems to be a feature of a modern lifestyle with quick snacks preferred to proper meals which may take some time to prepare and eat. Some schools have begun to tackle the problem by offering breakfast on the premises and providing healthier snacks as an alternative to fast food.

SCHOOL MEALS CONTRACTS

Governors can attempt to influence the nutritional specifications identified in catering contracts. The best way of doing this is to involve a

representative from the school meals service in the development of the food policy. It is essential that the contract explicitly requires caterers to follow specific nutritional guidelines, otherwise the school food policy could fail if caterers are not fully aware of what is required of them. Some guidelines can be very simple. For example, it can be written into the contract that fruit should always be on offer as part of a school meal. Other examples and advice are given in *Catering for Healthy Eating in Welsh Schools* (HPW, 1994) and *Nutritional Guidelines for School Meals* (Caroline Walker Trust, 1992).

appropriate, members of the school meals service, governors, teachers, parents, a representative from local health promotion services, a dentist, a dietitian, a home economist, a school nurse and pupils. Consultation with pupils is important in making them aware that their views count. This working party could also consider ways of monitoring the food policy and should keep the governing body informed through reports and discussions at regular intervals.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

The actual formulation of a food policy should be the responsibility of a working party of interested people and could include, where

AIMS OF A FOOD POLICY

A food policy should lead to an improvement in the nutritional quality of food consumed on school premises and an improvement in children's overall eating habits.

More specifically it should increase:

- the awareness, knowledge and understanding of the potential benefits of healthy eating
- awareness of healthier food choices
- pupils' skills in selecting healthier options
- the range of healthier food choices on the school premises at competitive prices
- the consumption of healthier food choices

POLICY INTO ACTION

It is important to remember that writing a policy is only a first step. A great deal of work is then necessary to put it into practice and, just as important, maintain the momentum.

FOOD IN THE CURRICULUM

The basis of a good food policy is a well planned curriculum. There are specific opportunities within the national curriculum in both science and technology to develop knowledge and skills related to healthy eating and food preparation. Schools may find it appropriate to develop these issues further as they consider use of the discretionary time available to them.

Curriculum Guidance 5: Health Education, (NCC 1990), outlines nine components of health education which may be covered in schools.

One of these is 'food and nutrition'. The document suggests that 'education about nutrition covers the relationship between diet and health, the nutritional quality of different foods and food safety. It encourages pupils to make healthy choices.'

Curriculum Guidance 5 also suggests appropriate areas of study which could incorporate information and skills related to food and nutrition in Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4 (see Appendix).

FOOD ON THE SCHOOL PREMISES

The challenge is to provide healthier food which is attractive and priced appropriately as the school may be in competition with high street fast food outlets.

MARKETING

The basic 'four P' principles of marketing apply to selling the healthier food options. These principles are:

- Provide a good quality **PRODUCT**
- **PRICE** foods appropriately and competitively
- **PLACE** foods in an attractive setting
- **PROMOTE** foods by imaginative use of displays etc.

If a food policy or a new aspect of healthy eating is to be introduced into the school it is important that every member of the catering and teaching staff should be fully informed, ideally will be in full agreement and will be fully motivated. The training of catering staff is important. For example, those who are behind the counter in the canteen or tuck shop and in

direct contact with the pupils can be influential. They know the pupils and a word of encouragement from them to try something new can have the desired effect.

This is only part of a wider marketing strategy which must be based on persuasion. The introduction of healthier options should increase choice and not restrict it.

There are a number of ways in which the healthier choices can be promoted and dietitians will advise on this. The options should always be displayed attractively and prominently in the canteen or tuck shop and, where possible, given eye-catching names. On occasions the choices might reflect a theme such as Halloween, Easter, November 5 etc.

Any marketing strategy should have some provision for encouraging the involvement of parents and the local community where possible.

RECIPE CHANGES

In addition to marketing the healthier options it is possible to make changes to traditional recipes or develop new recipes in order to reduce fat, sugar or salt or increase fibre. The changes should be such that the acceptability of the final product is unaffected. This can be achieved by ensuring that appropriate nutritional specifications are drawn up for a school meals contract. A review of the role of contract specifications can be found in *Catering for Healthy Eating in Welsh Schools* (HPW, 1994).

PACKED LUNCHES

Substantial numbers of children now take packed lunches to school.

Dietitians could be asked to provide guidance on suitable healthy contents.

For additional help in turning policy into action read *Catering for Life* (HPW, 1991).

GUIDE TO A FOOD POLICY

The formulation of a good policy takes time and discussion and the final document will vary according to local circumstances. The following are suggestions which, it is hoped, will be helpful.

INTRODUCTION

It should be made clear who the policy is for and should include an explanation of why a food policy is important and the particular merits of such a policy for school children. A brief outline of the document should be given with some guidance on how it should be used.

AIMS

This is a list of outcomes it is hoped will be achieved by the introduction of a policy (see page 9). The success of any policy is shown much more convincingly if a change can be specified in measurable terms. For example, it may be realistic to aim

for a 10 per cent increase in the consumption of fruit over a period of six months.

NUTRITIONAL GUIDELINES

These should be based on the healthy eating recommendations outlined in *Dietary Reference Values for food energy and nutrients for the United Kingdom* (Department of Health, 1991) The relevant information from this report has been included in *Nutritional Guidelines for School Meals* (Caroline Walker Trust, 1992)

STRATEGY FOR CHANGE

This section should cover how the changes will be implemented within the class-room, the school meals service, the tuck shop, vending machines and for those who eat food brought from home. It should also include information on how the healthier options will be marketed.

This section also needs to consider how parents, pupils or people within the community such as shopkeepers can help in promoting healthy eating.

MONITORING

It is important to keep a record of the successes and failures of the policy. For example, to record the

uptake of the healthier options and pupil reactions to them. Using the example given above, a six monthly review would indicate whether or not the consumption of fruit had increased by 10 per cent. A mechanism for regular reviews should be built in to the policy so that revision and improvement can take place as appropriate.

STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO HEALTHY EATING IN SCHOOL

STEP 1

Convene a Food Policy Development Group which could include representatives from the school meals service, governors, teachers, parents, local health promotion professionals, a dentist, a dietitian, a home economist, a school nurse and pupils.

STEP 2

Formulate a food policy (see page 13).

STEP 3

Implement the policy which includes marketing the healthier options.

STEP 4

Monitor the policy.

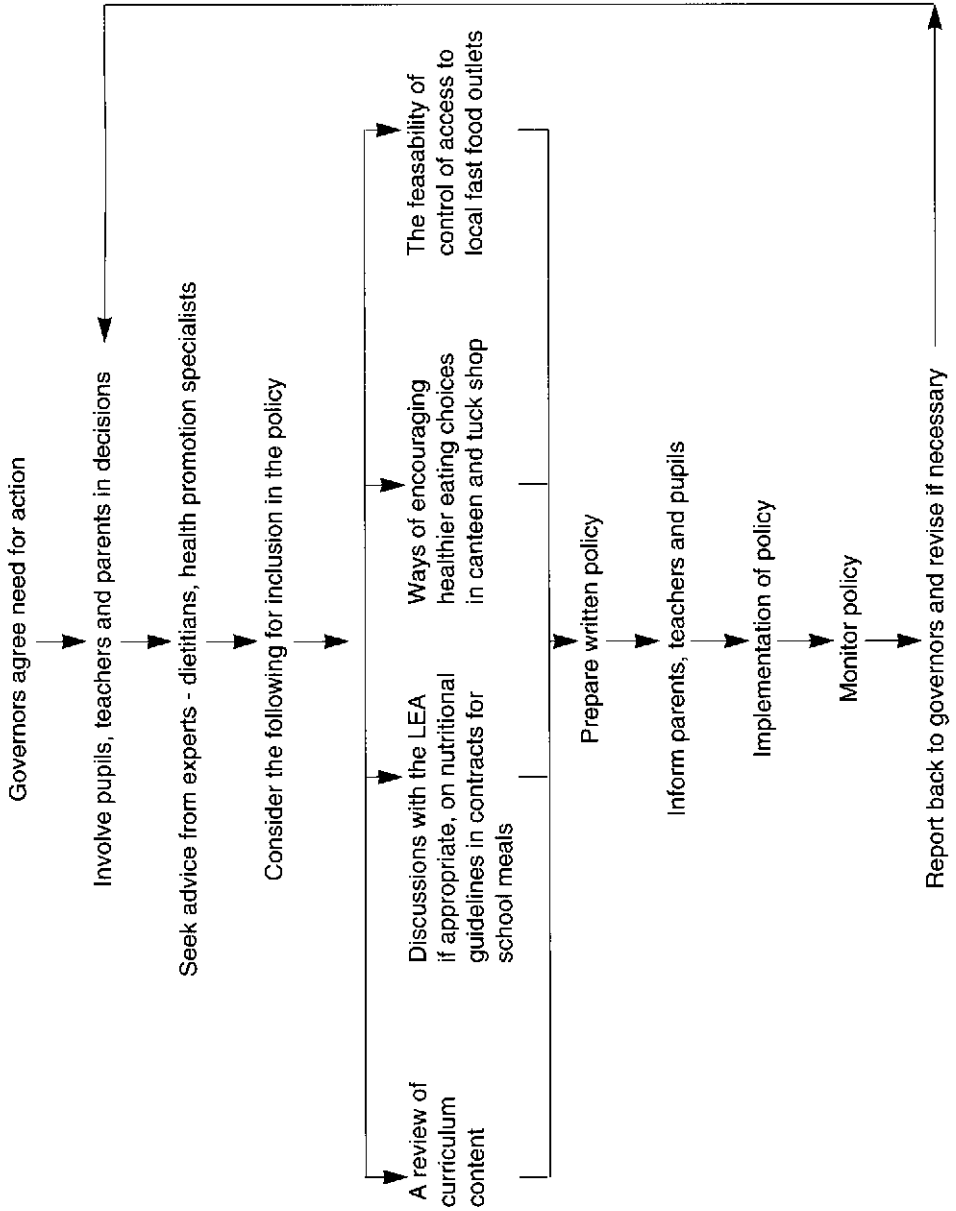
STEP 5

Review the policy.

STEP 6

Revise and improve the policy as appropriate.

DEVELOPING A FOOD POLICY



SOME SOURCES OF HELP

LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITIES

Support for health education in schools may be provided through:

- LEA policies to guide development;
- the work of advisers planning for cross-curricular issues in general as well as the theme of health education in particular;
- monitoring and evaluation data provided to schools by the LEA;
- the work of advisory teachers in assisting curriculum development teams and projects in schools and in providing INSET.

They offer a range of services such as:

- maintaining a library which includes a variety of teaching resources available on free loan;
- giving advice on local health promotion needs and programmes;
- providing guidance on planning and monitoring health promotion/education activities.
- providing contacts with dietitians from your local hospital or community nutrition and dietetic service.
- guidance on oral health.

DISTRICT HEALTH EDUCATION SERVICES

Other valuable sources of help are the health promotion and education services provided by local health services.

REFERENCES

Health Promotion Wales. (1993). *Diet and young people in Wales 1986-1992*. Health Promotion Wales Technical Report No 3. Cardiff: Health Promotion Wales.

National Curriculum Council. (1991). *Curriculum Guidance 5: Health Education*. York: National Curriculum Council.

Department of Health. (1991). *Dietary reference values for food energy and nutrients for the United Kingdom*. Report of the panel on dietary reference values of the committee on medical aspects of food policy. Report on health and social subjects 41. London: HMSO.

SUGGESTED READING

The Caroline Walker Trust. (1992). *Nutritional guidelines for school meals*. Report of an expert working group. Obtainable from School Meals, PO BOX 7, London W3 6XJ. £8.50 includes postage and packing.

School Meals Campaign. (1994). *Healthy school food: a guide for school governors and school boards*. Obtainable from School Meals Campaign, PO BOX 402, London WC1 9TZ. £2.50 includes postage and packing.

Health Promotion Authority for Wales. (1991). *Catering for life*. Cardiff : Health Promotion Authority for Wales.

Health Promotion Wales. (1994). *Catering for healthy eating in Welsh schools*. Cardiff : Health Promotion Wales.

Catering for healthy eating in Welsh schools (£6.50) and *Catering for Life* (£3.00) are obtainable from the Publishing section, Health Promotion Wales, Ffynnon-las, Tŷ Glas Avenue, Llanishen, Cardiff CF4 5DZ.

Please send cheque with order payable to Health Promotion Wales. Prices exclude postage and packing.

APPENDIX - THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Areas of study which could incorporate information and skills related to food and nutrition reproduced from *Curriculum Guidance 5: Health Education*, (NCC 1990) by kind permission of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

KEY STAGE 1

- know that there is a wide variety of foods to choose from and that choice is based on needs and/or culture;
- know that food is needed for bodily health and growth and that some foods are better than others.

KEY STAGE 2

- know that a diet is a combination of foods, each with a different nutrient content;
- know that different nutrients have different effects on the body, and

the amounts in the diet, and balance between them, can influence health, eg. sugar and dental health;

- know how to handle foods safely and recognise the importance of additives in food safety.

KEY STAGE 3

- know that individual health requires a varied diet;
- understand malnutrition and the relationships between diet, health, fitness and circulatory disorders;
- understand basic food microbiology, food production and processing techniques.

KEY STAGE 4

- be able to analyse and evaluate diet and recognise suitable adjustments which take account of a range of factors such as the availability of food and social,

cultural and financial influences;

- know that various types of diet promote health for different groups, acknowledging cultural and ethnic variations;
- understand consumer aspects of food hygiene; shopping for food; legislation, including the current food labelling system;
- understand the relationships between food, body image and self-esteem;
- have accurate information to enable them to distinguish between fact, propaganda and folklore in dietary matters.