

Summary of the new nutritional standards for school lunches and other school food

Background

In response to the findings of the secondary school meals survey (Nelson *et al.* 2004), and against a backdrop of increasing concern over children's diets, the School Meals Review Panel (SMRP) was established by DfES to transform school meals. The panel included headteachers, governors, school caterers, registered nutritionists and dietitians as well as parents and food industry representatives. The SMRP was asked by the Secretary of State for Education to review existing standards for school lunches and make recommendations to government, with the primary aim of reducing pupils' consumption of fat, salt and sugar and increasing consumption of nutrient-containing foods, such as fruit and vegetables.

The final report of the SMRP on nutritional standards for school lunches *Turning the Tables: Transforming School Food* was published on in October 2005. The DfES subsequently consulted widely on the recommendations of this report. Having considered the responses to the consultation, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has arrived at final decisions on the standards, which are summarised here.

To see the full report *Turning the Tables: Transforming School Food*, responses to the consultation and the report outlining the final decisions on the new standards, see:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/conresults.cfm?consultationId=1319>

Nutritional standards for school lunches

The core recommendations are as follows:

- **Food-based standards**, which will define the types of food that children and young people should be offered in a school lunch and their frequency.
- **Nutrient-based standards** which will set out the proportion of nutrients that children and young people should receive from a school lunch.

Timing

- Interim food-based standards are to be introduced by Sept 2006. These are a combination of the existing standards (introduced in 2001) and the new food-based standards. These are shown in table 1 (see below).
- Nutrient-based standards are to be introduced in primary schools from Sept 2008 and in secondary and special schools from Sept 2009. These are shown in table 2 (see below).
- When the nutrient based standards come into force, this will be alongside the food-based standards set out in table 3. The interim 'meshed' standards will then have served their purpose.

Standards for school food and drink, other than lunches

Similar standards are to apply to all school food other than lunches, as recommended by the School Food Trust. This means that:

- No confectionery will be sold in schools
- No bagged savoury snacks other than nuts and seeds (without added salt or sugar) will be sold in schools
- A variety of fruit and vegetables should be available in all school food outlets. This can include fresh, dried, frozen, canned or juiced varieties
- Children and young people must have easy access at all times to free, fresh drinking water in schools
- The only other drinks available will be:
 - 1) water (still or sparkling)
 - 2) milk (skimmed or semi-skimmed)
 - 3) pure fruit juices
 - 4) yogurt and milk drinks (with less than 5% added sugar)
 - 5) drinks made from combinations of (1) to (4) above
 - 6) low calorie hot chocolate
 - 7) tea and coffee

Artificial sweeteners can be used only in yogurt and milk drinks, or combinations containing yogurt or milk.

These standards, for food and drink other than lunch, are to be introduced by Sept 2007.

Table 1: Interim food-based standards for school lunches from Sept 2006 (primary, secondary and special schools)

<p>Fruit and vegetables – these include fruit and vegetables in all forms (whether fresh, frozen, canned, dried or in the form of juice).</p>	<p>Not less than two portions per day per child, at least one of which should be salad or vegetables and at least one should be fresh fruit, fruit tinned in juice or fruit salad (fresh or tinned in juice).</p> <p>A fruit based dessert shall be available at least twice per week in primary schools</p>
<p>Meat, fish and other non-dairy sources of protein</p> <p>- these include meat (including ham and bacon) and fish (whether fresh, frozen, canned or dried); eggs; nuts; pulses; and beans (other than green beans)</p>	<p>A food from this group should be available on a daily basis.</p> <p>Red meat shall be available twice per week in primary schools, and three times per week in secondary schools.</p> <p>Fish shall be available once per week in primary schools and twice per week in secondary schools. Of that fish, oily fish shall be available at least once every three weeks.</p> <p>For the purposes of lunches for registered pupils at primary schools, sources of protein in this group can include dairy sources of protein.</p>
<p>Manufactured meat products</p>	<p>Manufactured meat products may be served occasionally as part of school lunches, provided that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) meet the legal minimum meat content levels set out in the Meat Products (England) Regulations 2003. Products not specifically covered by these legal minima must meet the same minimum meat content levels prescribed for burgers; ii) are not “economy burgers” as described in the Meat Products (England) Regulations 2003; and iii) contain none of the following list of offal, except that mammalian large or small intestine may be used as a sausage skin (including chipolatas, frankfurters, salami, links and similar products): Brains, lungs, rectum, stomach, feet, oesophagus, spinal cord, testicles, large intestine, small intestine, spleen, udder.
<p>Starchy foods (<i>also see additional requirement on deep frying below</i>) - these include all bread (eg. chapattis), pasta, noodles, rice, potatoes, sweet potatoes, yams, millet and cornmeal.</p>	<p>A food from this group should be available on a daily basis.</p> <p>Fat or oil shall not be used in the cooking process of starchy foods on more than three days in any week.</p> <p>On every day that a fat or oil is used in the cooking process of starchy foods, a starchy food for which fat or oil is not used in the cooking process should also be available.</p> <p>In addition, bread should be available on a daily basis.</p>
<p>Deep-fried foods</p>	<p>Meals should not contain more than two deep-fried items in a single week. This includes products which are deep-fried in the manufacturing process.</p>

<p>Milk and dairy foods – includes milk, cheese, yoghurt (including frozen and drinking yoghurt), fromage frais, and custard</p>	<p>A food from this group should be available on a daily basis.</p>
<p>Drinks</p>	<p>The only drinks available should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plain water (still or fizzy); milk (skimmed or semi-skimmed); pure fruit juices; yoghurt or milk drinks (with less than 5% added sugar); drinks made from combinations of those in bullet points 1 to 4 of this list (eg. smoothies); low calorie hot chocolate; tea and coffee. <p>NB – Artificial sweeteners could be used only in yoghurt and milk drinks; or combinations containing yoghurt or milk.</p>
<p>Water</p>	<p>There should be easy access at all times to free, fresh drinking water.</p>
<p>Salt and condiments</p>	<p>Table salt should not be made available.</p> <p>If made available, condiments should be available only in sachets.</p>
<p>Confectionery and savoury snacks</p>	<p>Confectionery, chocolate and chocolate-coated products (excluding cocoa powder used in chocolate cakes, or low calorie hot drinking chocolate) shall not be available throughout the lunch time.</p> <p>The only savoury snacks available should be nuts and seeds with no added salt or sugar.</p>

Table 2: Nutrient-based standards for school lunches from Sept 2008 (primary schools) or Sept 2009 (secondary and special schools)

This table summarises the proportion of nutrients that children and young people should receive from a school lunch. The figures are for the required nutrient content of an average lunch over five consecutive school days.

Nutrient	Proportion that should be provided by a school lunch
Energy	30% of the estimated average requirement (EAR)
Protein	Not less than 30% of reference nutrient intake (RNI)
Total carbohydrate	Not less than 50% of food energy
Non-milk extrinsic sugars	Not more than 11% of food energy
Fat	Not more than 35% of food energy
Saturated fat	Not more than 11% of food energy
Fibre	Not less than 30% of the calculated reference value <i>Note: calculated as Non Starch Polysaccharides (NSP)</i>
Sodium	Not more than 30% of the SACN recommendation
Vitamin A	Not less than 40% of the RNI
Vitamin C	Not less than 40% of the RNI
Folate/folic acid	Not less than 40% of the RNI
Calcium	Not less than 40% of the RNI
Iron	Not less than 40% of the RNI
Zinc	Not less than 40% of the RNI

EAR = Estimated Average Requirement – the average amount of energy or nutrients needed by a group of people.

RNI = Reference Nutrient Intake – the amount of a nutrient which is enough to meet the dietary requirements of about 97% of a group of people.

SACN = Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition.

Table 3: Food-based standards for school lunches from Sept 2008 (primary schools) or Sept 2009 (secondary and special schools)

<p>Fruit and vegetables – these include fruit and vegetables in all forms (whether fresh, frozen, canned, dried or in the form of juice)</p>	<p>Not less than two portions per day per child, at least one of which should be salad or vegetables and at least one should be fresh fruit, fruit tinned in juice or fruit salad (fresh or tinned in juice).</p>
<p>Oily fish</p>	<p>Oily fish shall be available at least once every three weeks</p>
<p>Manufactured meat products</p>	<p>Manufactured meat products may be served occasionally as part of school lunches, provided that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) meet the legal minimum meat content levels set out in the Meat Products (England) Regulations 2003. Products not specifically covered by these legal minima must meet the same minimum meat content levels prescribed for burgers; ii) are not “economy burgers” as described in the Meat Products (England) Regulations 2003; and iii) contain none of the following list of offal, except that mammalian large or small intestine may be used as a sausage skin (including chipolatas, frankfurters, salami, links and similar products): Brains, lungs, rectum, stomach, feet, oesophagus, spinal cord, testicles, large intestine, small intestine, spleen, udder.
<p>Bread</p>	<p>Bread should be available on a daily basis.</p>
<p>Deep-fried foods</p>	<p>Meals should not contain more than two deep-fried items in a single week. This includes products which are deep-fried in the manufacturing process.</p>
<p>Drinks</p>	<p>The only drinks available should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plain water (still or fizzy); • milk (skimmed or semi-skimmed); • pure fruit juices; • yoghurt or milk drinks (with less than 5% added sugar); • drinks made from combinations of those in bullet points 1 to 4 of this list (eg. smoothies); • low calorie hot chocolate; • tea and coffee. <p>NB – Artificial sweeteners could be used only in yoghurt and milk drinks; or combinations containing yoghurt or milk</p>
<p>Water</p>	<p>There should be easy access at all times to free, fresh drinking water.</p>

Salt and condiments	Table salt should not be made available. If made available, condiments should be available only in sachets.
Confectionery and savoury snacks	Confectionery, chocolate and chocolate-coated products (excluding cocoa powder used in chocolate cakes, or low calorie hot drinking chocolate) shall not be available throughout the lunch time. The only savoury snacks available should be nuts and seeds with no added salt or sugar.

Further key points from the Government response to the SMRP recommendations on other issues:

- Schools should aspire to achieve the highest quality of provision, which is a hot meal, cooked on-site, from fresh and seasonal ingredients. While this is an aim that schools should aspire to, the priority is that pupils should be offered healthy school food that meets the nutritional standards, however this is achieved.
- The Food Standards Agency's target nutrient specifications (TNS) were published alongside the new school food standards. TNS are nutrient criteria which have been set for manufactured products used in school meals. For example, manufactured foods to be used in school meals should meet certain criteria for fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt. There are also criteria for the minimum protein level in vegetarian foods. These targets should help caterers provide foods which help meet the new school meal standards. For further details see: <http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2006/may/nutrientspecs>
- All schools and caterers are encouraged to carry out a needs analysis of their school meals provision and train all relevant staff to ensure they are able to support pupils in making healthy choices. A level 1 qualification in providing a healthier meals service has been available since Sept 2005 and qualifications at levels 2 and 3 are currently being developed.
- Catering staff need to be central to the whole school approach and schools and caterers will be encouraged to make this a priority.
- There is an expectation that all schools will be participating in the Healthy Schools Scheme by the end of 2009. All schools should develop, implement and publish a whole-school food policy to ensure that consistent messages about healthy food choices run throughout all aspects of school life.
- Schools also need to consider the impact of packed lunches and food brought into schools. The School Food Trust and Food Standards Agency will be producing further guidance on packed lunches in the Autumn of 2006.
- Implementation of the new standards is to be monitored and evaluated through regular inspections carried out by Ofsted.