

Dear Headteacher and Chair of Governors

Re: Support for schools with food policy and provision

We are writing to you to offer support, information and resources to help your school with reviewing or refreshing your **school food provision**.

The past 18 months have been an extremely challenging time for schools. For many, there have been restrictions on the time pupils can spend in the dinner hall and on the options for school meal provision. As restrictions have eased, we are aware that some schools are now beginning to review and 'take stock' of their food provision and policies, and thus we wanted to offer some support and advice with this. It is worth to note that 225 (over 60%) of the county's schools are now taking part in Healthy Schools.

COVID-19 has brought the importance of healthy, affordable food and good nutrition further to our attention. The pandemic pushed many more families into food poverty, with schools playing a vital role in supporting their most vulnerable families to access support. Early indication suggests the numbers of children carrying excess weight in North Yorkshire (already 23% of 4-5-year olds and 33% of 10-11 year olds) has risen since the start of the pandemic.

Schools have a key role in supporting children and young people to develop healthy eating habits and ensuring children have enough energy to learn well. A **whole school approach** to food provision and nutrition education can support children and young people to develop healthy eating habits for life.

Below are a few ideas and links that you may find useful when reviewing your school's food policy and provision:

- Government guidance on school food in England strongly encourages Governing bodies to work with the senior leadership team to develop a **whole school food policy**. This sets out the school's approach to its provision of food, food education, the role of the catering team and the school's strategy to increase the take-up of school lunches. All food provided in school should meet the [National School Food Standards](#) (mandatory in all maintained schools, new academies and free schools). There are some great ideas around policy development at [What works well | Home \(schoolfoodplan.com\)](#).
- **If you haven't already - sign up for [North Yorkshire's Healthy Schools Award](#)**: Despite the challenges faced by schools during the pandemic, 55 new schools signed up to the Award in the year from April 2020 and 62 applied for Awards. The public website has a Resources page for each

of the themes including relevant policies and documents that can support you in your school food policy development; and around nutrition education in the curriculum [Food in Schools - Healthy Schools North Yorkshire](#). [Free online training](#) is available for support.

- **Maximise uptake of Free School Meals:** Healthy school food can provide a significant proportion of a child's daily nutritional requirements, improve pupils' readiness to learn and help pupils establish healthy habits for life. Some primary schools are now making their Universal Infant Free School Meals compulsory for all Reception and KS1 children. Ensuring as many eligible families as possible from KS2 upwards register for free school meals, encourages healthy, sociable eating and limits packed lunch numbers. More information about Free Schools Meals in North Yorkshire can be found [here](#).
- **Work with your catering provider** to ensure school food is meeting National Food Standards and that healthy options are available. Our own NYCC caterers (NYES Catering) provide school meals for 240 schools across North Yorkshire. Their meals meet the National School Food Standards and they have recently reduced sugar and increased the fibre content of their meals. NYES also run [courses for schools](#) on the School Food Standards, Food Safety, Food Allergens and Healthy Eating (**available to all**, regardless of your catering provider). See www.nyestraining.co.uk. Healthy Schools and Public Health can also support independent caterers to improve school food provision.
- **Support parents with healthy packed lunch guidance:** To support schools in providing evidence-based guidance for parents, North Yorkshire's Public Health and Healthy Schools teams have produced guidance for primary schools and parents in the form of a Healthy Packed lunch leaflet for families. This leaflet takes a positive approach; and aims to guide families towards providing a healthy and balanced packed lunch for their child. It provides ideas on what to include and why, with links to lots of useful information and resources. The leaflet is being piloted during October and will be disseminated to schools (for families) in November. Contact Helen or Ruth (below).
- **Ensure the provision of Free Drinking Water:** It is a requirement of the National School Food Standards that fresh, free drinking water is available at all times in school. This enables children to keep hydrated throughout the day, which can improve their concentration, encourages good health and wellbeing; and prevents tiredness and irritability. See [Water Provision 09_10.pdf \(hscni.net\)](#) for guidance and support on water provision.

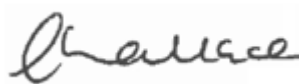
Useful contacts

Ruth Stacey, Healthy Schools Programme Manager: Ruth.stacey@northyorks.gov.uk
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Yours sincerely



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