# Wandsworth Schools Food Strategy





## Foreword

In Wandsworth children are at the heart of all we do. Ensuring all children and young people have access to good, nutritious food ensures they have the opportunity to start well, achieve their goals and aspirations and grow up to be healthy adults.

We are thrilled to introduce our Children's School Food Strategy which is aligned to the Council's "health in all policies" approach, which ensures prevention is embedded in all programmes and policies. We are a listening council, committed to ensuring that children and families grow up happy and healthy, with services informed by what our families tell us are the day-to-day impacts of the rising cost of living. We know that the impacts are adding to a widening of socioeconomic inequalities and unfairness, with food poverty linked to and as a result of fuel poverty and low pay.

This strategy sets out how we will support our schools and engage with key stakeholders to address barriers and opportunities identified. At the centre of our approach is ensuring all children have access to good food which is vital to their health and academic achievement. Our aim is to create a borough where everyone, whatever their background, has the same opportunity to reach their potential and enjoy a good quality of life.

Our strategy outlines a range of activities and initiatives that we will be implementing over the coming months and years to support children and young people to access good food.



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## **INTRODUCTION**

Good food is vital to children's health and academic achievement, but access to affordable, nutritious food has become more challenging for an increasing number of families in Wandsworth and nationally.

The pandemic highlighted the challenge many families face, and the current cost of living crisis is widening and deepening this issue and will continue to have health impacts ranging from hunger to obesity, and social consequences such as social exclusion.

We want to ensure Wandsworth is the best place to grow up and that there are opportunities for everyone to reach their potential no matter their background. We know that healthy school food for all children will help to mitigate the impacts of household food insecurity, especially for those pupils not currently eligible for the national Free School Meals scheme.

School meals are uniquely placed to address undernutrition and obesity by promoting healthy diets and can reach more children than in any other way. A third of all meals eaten outside of the home are in publicly funded institutions such as schools, universities, hospitals, carehomes and staff canteens. A functioning school food system, especially the school meals service, is paramount to delivering a positive ethos. High quality, nutritious, food underpins positive learning, health and wellbeing outcomes for children. There is an opportunity to address the existing challenges in the Wandsworth school meals system to ensure it delivers better health, education, economic and social outcomes. We are committed to integrating the new school meals contract with holistic whole school provision. This will reduce food poverty and ensure as many children as possible have healthy, nutritious meals. The recent announcement by the Mayor that all London Primary schools will be funded to provide Universal Free School Meals from September 2023 makes the development of this strategy even more timely and important to ensure that we maximise the wonderful opportunity that this presents.

In September 2022 a paper was taken to <u>Children's</u> <u>Committee</u>, approving the development of a holistic Children's School Food strategy. This strategy has been co-produced with stakeholders and reflects the needs of the community. It brings together the existing work being done to provide access to good food for children and an innovative action plan for new activities that will provide ongoing long-term support.

To focus our work, the Strategy will be accompanied by an 'Action Plan'. This will set out what operational activity will take place and who is responsible. The Action Plan will be regularly monitored, and we are confident planning and delivering services together with a holistic approach will lead to effective transformation to our school meals.

## **Our landscape**



4th largest population of children amongst inner London boroughs,
63,738 children aged 0-17

26% of school pupils eligible and claiming free school meals

## **OUR KEY THEMES**







## **Food Education**









## **Food inclusion**

#### Every child has access to enough food to live an active, healthy life

Our aim is to tackle and address food poverty and ensure children in Wandsworth have a healthy start in life. This requires a whole system approach, recognising that food poverty is as a result of other issues including fuel poverty, low pay, social deprivation and housing.

#### **Current Challenges and Support**

#### **Cost of Living Crisis**

The council is committed to deliver a fairer, more compassionate and more sustainable borough. Helping vulnerable residents struggling to put food on the table is at the heart of these commitments. The price of food on supermarket shelves increased by 9% from April 2021 to April 2022. Families are increasingly struggling to afford food and being forced to make difficult choices when it comes to food every day. More than 2.3million Londoners live below the poverty line and the number of people experiencing deeper poverty has increased over the past 5 years.

#### Free School Meals

In Wandsworth, the latest school census data shows that 9,300 children are now known to be eligible for Free Schools Meals (26% of the maintained and academy school population). This is a rise from 17% in 2019 and are the highest figures ever recorded for the borough. However, the threshold of eligibility for free school meals is very low. Anyone earning over £7,400 annually and claiming universal credit is not eligible for free school meals.

Wandsworth are working towards achieving a borough of sanctuary status. We will concentrate on expanding the eligibility criteria for Free school meals (FSM) population, but also ensuring our sanctuary seekers and those with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) are targeted groups for support.

In 2023 the Mayor of London announced an £130m emergency scheme to help families with the cost of living by ensuring that every primary schoolchild in London will receive free school meals for one year from September 2023. The move will help around 270,000 primary school children in London and save families around £460 per child across the year. In Wandsworth this will mean that around an extra 2900 children will become eligible for a free school meal. The Council will continue to support schools with identifying as many eligible families and children as possible, to ensure that schools get the maximum pupil premium funding that they are entitled to. We will review all our processes and 'touch points' with families so that we identify as may opportunities as possible to check families eligibility for free school meals and remove any barriers to the application process. We will also use our data to identify those families who fall outside of the eligibility criteria and target additional support to provide healthy, nutritious food to children on a daily basis via breakfast and afterschool provisions.

#### **School Meals Service**

School meals are uniquely placed to address under-nutrition and obesity by promoting healthy diets and can reach more children than in any other way. In 2023 Wandsworth awarded a new catering contract following the adoption of a model specification from the charity, School Food Matters. The overarching aims of the school meals service for Wandsworth are to:

- Provide high quality, healthy and sustainable food,
- Increase school meal uptake
- Adopt a whole school approach to healthy eating
- Ensure a motivated and valued workforce
- Embed sustainable practices in service provision and minimise carbon footprint and environmental impact of the service

Some of the ways we will work with the school meals partner and increase the uptake of school meals will be by;

- Providing a Menu Flyer to all parents termly when the menus are due to change.
- Giving a free lunch to all paying children during the first few weeks of the autumn term in 2023
- An invitation for parents and grandparents to join their child for lunch
- Playground Taster Sessions held at the end of the school day to promote the quality of the caterers food.
- Local Choice Menu each school menu/offer represents their own specific needs.
- Special Day Menus and Themed Events- supporting a whole school approach.

#### **Culturally Inclusive**

One of the ways cultures are expressed is through the foods we eat. It is important for school meals to include foods that reflect the cultural and religious demographics of our school communities. School meals are a great way to connect with children and show them the school understands and celebrates who they are. It can also be a great way to increase participation. Focusing on cultural preferences can help to improve access by catering to the flavours of our school communities. The schools catering provider awarded in 2023 has committed to ensuring this is integral to their planning e.g. Curriculum linked/topical theme days/menus - World Book Day, Olympics, World Cup etc.



#### Children with food allergies/intolerances

The schools catering provider recognises that students may suffer allergic reactions or may be intolerant to one or more of the commonly eaten foods. The catering provider will work with each school and build in key mitigations to address issues allowing them to ensure the correct meals are provided to pupils with particular needs in terms of food allergy or intolerance.

#### Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Acknowledging and ensuring the needs of our SEND children are recognised and where possible barriers addressed e.g., by including the International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) framework in our school meals specification to ensure that the range and complexity of needs for this group of children are improved upon and allow them to thrive.

#### Warm Spaces and Childrens Centres

The Council launched Warm Spaces in response to the cost-of-living crisis in 2022 with the evaluation of the scheme to be evaluated in Spring 2023. Wandsworth residents have access to a group of places where residents can come together to stay warm with some venues also offering hot drinks, activities and access to other services. Enhanced services are also offered at six children's centres which provide family-oriented services for young families of children up to the age of five. These include breakfast clubs, lunch and learn sessions, stay and play along with the chance for parents to charge phones, and where available, use shower and washing facilities.

National and local evidence shows that levels of food insecurity across London and in Wandsworth are rising, with parents and families having to make difficult decisions every day. In 2021-22 the Trussell Trust reported at Wandsworth Foodbanks that their provision of emergency food supplies to local people whose income did not cover the cost of essentials, increased by 53% on pre-pandemic levels, noting that over 1 in 3 of these emergency food supplies were for children. They also reported that 6 in 10 parents at the foodbank had skipped meals so their children could eat, during the previous month. Food banks are a great provision however, families need more support with budgeting and food education/knowledge. Many parents attending foodbanks are not supported in making cost savings decisions to support their families and continuing to struggle. Alongside this there is an issue of support for refugee families who although they can take food from a food back, have nowhere to cook as their accommodation does not have cooking facilities.

#### Low-income Family Tracker (LIFT project)

The Council has invested in building and integrating a low-income family tracker. This will improve the quality of the data held by our benefits teams, data analytics and data held by children's services and enable us to better support schools and their families to ensure that we can identify all households and children eligible for free school meals, that we do all we can to make sure they take that meal and that their school receives the associated Pupil Premium funding they are entitled to.

We will review and improve our processes for identifying children and families and move towards an 'auto-enrolment' system so that the process for families and schools is seamless and un-bureaucratic.





## **Food provision**

#### Every child to have access to nutritious food so that they are wellnourished and ready to learn.

Children's food preferences and eating habits are formed early in life with consequences for a range of health and development outcomes in later life. Therefore, it is important the food offered in early years settings provides appropriate amounts of energy and nutrients and encourages the development of healthy eating habits in young children, both to support appropriate growth and development, and as part of national priorities to reduce childhood obesity and ensure every child has the best start in life. With increasing pressure and sacrifices to ensure there is even some food on the table, families are not always able to make healthy, nutritious choices. A further consequence of food insecurity is the rising number of obese children. Calorie for calorie, less healthy food is on average three times cheaper than healthy food. We are committed to ensuring that no child goes hungry and are eating, healthy nutritious food. We have actively addressed this and will continue to enhance our offer via supporting and promoting the following programmes:

- Free school meal vouchers in key holiday periods
- Promotion of Healthy Start Vouchers
- Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF) delivered in partnership with local community and voluntary organisations
- Healthy schools London Programme
- Breastfeeding promotion programmes
- Promotion of Primary School Milk Scheme
- Nursery Milk Scheme
- School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme (SFVS)

#### **Current Challenges and Support**

Food provision across the whole school day (breakfast, lunch, after school) has to collectively comply with the School Food Standard. However, this is challenging as schools very often use different providers for each meal who do not communicate to ensure School Food Standards are collectively met. Training for staff in schools is, therefore, key. The governing board of a school are responsible for the provision of school food and it is the statutory responsibility of the governing body and trustees to ensure the School Food Standards are being met.

#### **Breakfast Provision**

Magic Breakfast is a charity that supports provision of breakfast clubs, normally in schools having at least 35% of pupils eligible for free school meals. They are the UK's largest, hunger-focused school breakfast provider. Wandsworth have engaged Magic Breakfast to support 20 Wandsworth schools from January 2023 with the highest numbers of free school meal eligible children. For each school that a breakfast club is funded for, the school will receive free food to provide breakfast for all their potentially hungry children, without barrier or stigma. The objectives are to ensure a nutritious and filling breakfast is provided to as many pupils at risk of hunger as possible and to build our capacity to provide a long-term solution to child hunger.

## Our recent Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire told us that...

14% (Primary), 7% (Secondary) of school pupils worry 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' about having enough food to eat.

**51% of pupils** who said their family has used a food bank

**9% of or primary school** children had nothing to eat or drink for breakfast on the day of the survey

By the time the children get to secondary school **22% of pupils did not have breakfast**  Schools will receive support from a designated member of the Magic Breakfast staff called an Engagement Partner, who helps school staff with setting up and optimising their breakfast provision. This support is tailored to each school's specific need, based on what the Engagement Partner knows works well in other schools – allowing for our partner schools to share ideas and learning. The learning will inform our future provision and our evaluation and monitoring will include;

- A baseline taken of the schools on the programme.
- A summer data collection through a Measuring & Monitoring survey.
- End of year report which will include the above data, compared with the baseline.
- Qualitative stories written on 4 schools.

#### **Lunch Provision**

Eating school meals is best for children but many parents often believe that a packed lunch is the healthiest option. In fact, it is far easier to get the necessary nutrients into a cooked meal. Only 1% of packed lunches meet the nutritional standards that currently apply to school food. The new catering provider for our schools from September 2023 will ensure those provided with a school meal will:

- Have access to vegetables and fruit (at least 2 portions per day)
- Have access to bread /ensure it is on offer every day
- Have access to fish regularly on menus at least once a week, including oily fish at least once every 3 weeks

- Minimise the use of processed meat products and meet the requirements for restricted processed meat categories as stipulated by the Children's Food Trust
- Have easy access to fresh chilled drinking water

#### Holidays Activities and Food (HAF) Programme

We are proud to take part in the government's Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme which is targeted at all children in reception to end of year 11 or those with SEND in receipt of benefit related free school meals. In 2023 Wandsworth have in excess of 30 providers currently delivering this programme, with a good spread of spaces across the whole borough.

The HAF programme provides access to local activities and services during the school holiday period for those that are eligible. Organisations must provide at least one hot meal a day (breakfast, lunch or dinner) and all food provided at the holiday club (including snacks) must meet school food standards. Providers must also include an element of nutritional education each day aimed at improving the knowledge and awareness of healthy eating for children.



## **Food education**

## To help facilitate children eating food that contributes to their health and well-being.

Lifestyles and habits established during childhood, adolescence and young adulthood influence a person's health throughout their life. Ensuring good health through childhood can boost attendance and educational achievement.

The National Food Strategy report outlines the need for the government to focus on establishing effective food education as part of the wider food system.

Schools have the potential to make an enormous impact on a young person's life. Especially during primary school, many children are receptive to the surrounding environment. The earlier changes are introduced, the bigger the effect these changes have. Schools can give students an example of healthy eating and provide them with positive values surrounding food that will follow them through life.

#### **Current Challenges and Support**

#### **Childhood Obesity**

The lockdown response to the COVID 19 pandemic led to the largest increase in child obesity prevalence since the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) began in 2006.

Data from 2020/21 noted that in Wandsworth;

- 37% of boys and 27% of girls were identified as overweight or obese.
- 17% of children in the most deprived wards were obese compared with 2% living in the top least deprived areas
- 3 times higher rates of obesity in year 6 compared with reception.

National research suggests that providing primary age children with free school meals might be important in helping children to maintain a healthy weight. A 2015 study by the Nuffield Foundation and the University of Essex found that the introduction of free school meal provision for 4- to 7-year-olds was associated with a 7.4% reduction in obesity rates over a period of 190 days (one school year).

In response to this, Roehampton University started a healthy weight pilot for students in Year 4 (across two schools) for the academic year 2022/23. The pilot looks to evaluate combining three, singularly effective, approaches into one, multi-initiative, intervention being:

- a ME (mentored exercise),
- b HENRY Evidence based programme often delivered alongside HV services and offered in neighbouring boroughs
- c TastEd (a form of sensory food education)

The NHS recommends children aged 5-18 get 60 minutes of physical activity every day! This regular physical activity helps improve concentration, self-esteem and raise children's attainment. Getting children active will also help them maintain good health and wellbeing as they grow up.

Initiatives such as the <u>Active Mile</u> encourage schools to build regular exercise into the daily routine. The simplicity of an Active Mile means there is no need for any new resources or training. The children run in their uniforms, so no changing is required. Some schools find it helpful to put a slot into the timetable, or school could do it when concentration starts to waiver: whenever suits the class.

## Childhood obesity - why it matters

Overweight and obese children are more likely to be overweight or obese as an adult

Childhood obesity is linked to poorer academic performance. Overweight and obese children are four times more likely to say they struggle with school and are more likely to miss days of school

Obese children are more likely to suffer with potentially life thretening health conditions such as type 2 diabetes, coronary heart diseaese and sleep appnea

Overweight children often have fewer friends, so get less social interaction Overweight children are more likely to get out of breath and not be able to keep up with their friends

Being obese as a child puts you at increased risk of ill health and shortens healthy life expectancy

Overweight and obese children are more likely to be bullied at school. They face discrimination based on their weight and get left out of social situations

> Obesity is associated with poor self-esteem and a negative body image

#### Healthy Schools London (HSL) programme

This programme seeks to help schools develop their health and wellbeing policies and procedures and recognise and reward health

promoting activities through accreditation. The scheme is one of the many vehicles that is fundamental for achieving regional and national strategies including the School Food Plan set out to transform what children eat in schools and how they learn about food. Other regional strategies including <u>Every Child a Healthy Weight'</u> London's Health Inequality Strategy and <u>From Harm to Hope:</u> a 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives.

Schools are signposted to a variety of resources and provided with training opportunities covering curriculum areas such as mental health and wellbeing, Personal Social Health Education, physical activity and healthy eating including nutrition and food curriculum. Wandsworth supports this evidence-based "whole school approach" as a long term initiative to support improve the health and well-being of children and young people. In 2022 a total of 11 Wandsworth schools had a current healthy school status.

Our ambition for schools would be to adopt a;

- whole school food and drink policy
- to review their packed lunch policy
- set up school nutrition action groups (to oversee the whole-school food culture)

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By surrounding children with the theme of healthy eating in all aspects of their school life they begin to value the food they put in their mouths. It may take small changes to begin with, but it's an important step towards normalising food education. Important lessons for children to learn are:

- Where our food comes from
- Which food is healthy and unhealthy
- How we can grow our own food
- How we can cook our own meals

There are a number of initiatives which we hope schools will adopt to support a healthy eating policy which include:

- Taster pots encourage sampling of unfamiliar dishes to children and young people
- Pupil and parent cookery clubs
- Pupil workshops educating that healthy food is tasty and fun smoothie, salad, herbs, fruit - encourages children to try out new foods and experiment with tastes and textures - confidence building.
- Making healthy food fun and appealing deli days, smoothie week, outdoor barbeques
- Curriculum linked/topical theme days/menus World Book Day, Olympics, World Cup etc
- Working with healthy schools' coordinators at each school and healthy schools' advisors on a more strategic level
- Pupil recipe competition design a lunch suitable for use as a school meal guidelines issued based on use of fresh ingredients and the plate of good health - winning three entries feature on menu on 'Winners Day'
- Use of seasonal produce
- Ensuring catering personnel are trained and understand the general requirement for and principles of healthier catering practices and specifically the Government food and nutrition standards.

#### Educating Pupils in Healthy Eating and Food Provenance

- Introduction of 'Ambassadors' Older pupils are selected to act as food ambassadors during the lunchtime service to assist younger children in making healthy, balanced food choices.
- Under Cover Agents -Selected pupils will go in as our 'undercover agents' and review the lunchtime experience to give feedback relating to food, service and the environment.
- Junior Tasters- A selection of pupils are given the opportunity to taste test new dishes.
- Fun Interactive Chefs Table as part of a school's recognition scheme, children can experience a fun and interactive lunch with the chef.

#### **Supporting School Leaders**

The role of school leaders is vital in leading change and developing new strategies. We will support and develop School Business Leaders who are at the heart of a school's food service. We are working with Southwark Council, who have developed a CPD certified training package to help School Business Leaders.

The on-line, modular training course will:

- Encourage schools to take a 'whole school approach' to food
- Help ensure the meals served at schools are delicious, nutritious and value for money
- Boost SBL confidence, knowledge and skills around school food service procurement and management
- Strengthen SBL peer support network, through sharing examples of what works well, and lessons learned

At the end of the course each school will have an approved School Food Action Plan signed by the school leadership. This will then be used to guide and manage all school food activities to ensure a great school food culture that is right for the school needs.



## **Sustainability**

#### Carbon emissions associated with the production of food make up approximately a quarter of global Greenhouse Gas emissions and are a significant part of the UK population's consumption-based carbon emissions.

Wandsworth are actively involved in the London Councils 'One World Living programme' to reduce the climate impact of London's food system.

This Strategy will take into account measures to reduce carbon emissions associated with school food, and considers factors such as carbon intensity of foods, transport and food waste. These factors can also support co-benefits such as improved air quality and healthier diets and help Wandsworth as a borough to achieve its target of being net zero by 2050.

#### **Current Challenges and Support**

Improvements to the school food system should reduce food waste across the supply chain. Wandsworth aims to mitigate the impact our urban food system has on the environment. Our goal would be that seasonal and local produce is in high demand, and the carbon footprint and negative environmental impact from food miles, processing and unsustainable packaging is minimised. Wandsworth would like to foster a strong culture of reduce, reuse, repurpose, recycle, and where food production practices are supported.

Our aim is to encourage and support schools to embed sustainable practices and minimise the carbon footprint and environmental impact. Educating children on the sustainability of the food they eat at school will likely instill habits that they will take with them to their homes, communities, and into adulthood.

Our hope is with the new schools catering partner schools will be able to:

- Ensure branded packaging is certified compostable in under 12 weeks and can go into the food waste bin and reduced waste going to landfill or incineration by using plant-based disposables.
- Have a fresh food approach that delivers a service which minimises food waste by focusing on key areas:
  - Menu planning
  - Dishes including meat free option and numbers produced
  - Effective ordering
  - Correct receiving of goods
  - Correct stock rotation
  - Minimum stock levels and effective storage
  - Good preparation and cooking
  - Batch cooking so food does not spoil
  - Portion management
  - 'Just in time cooking' towards the end of service
  - Good communication with customers and client
  - Monitoring of food waste
  - Introduce drinks dispensed into reusable cups not single use plastic. Assist schools to ensure plastic waste is recycled.
  - Grocery supplier's fleet of vehicles includes 66% Euro V1 engines, which reduce emissions and improve air quality.
  - Waste oil is converted to biodiesel and used in delivery vehicles.

## **Action plan**

actions	owner	timescales	measuring impact
Setup School Food Working Group to oversee, coordinate and progress the strategy and action plan. Membership to comprise of schools, multi-agency partners and representatives from education services.	Gary Hipple	January 2023	The action plan is reviewed on a bi- annual basis and adapted as new improvement activities emerge.
Review council benefits application process with an aim to change to include checking for FSM eligibility.	Gary Hipple/ Penny Lovatt	May 2023	Decision on whether benefits process should be adapted or use LIFT tool on an annual basis.
Introduce Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) to match Benefits data with FSM data.	John O'Sullivan	February 2023	Numbers of children identified that were not known to be eligible for FSM
Develop a process to contact families identified by the LIFT tool and then auto-enrol in time for the new school year and the October census, so that schools can maximise Pupil Premium funding.	Gary Hipple	June 2023	New process in place to auto-enrol.
Magic Breakfast Pilot to commence across 20 schools from January 2023.	Gary Hipple	January 2023- January 2024	20 schools recruited and get a breakfast programme up and running.
Magic Breakfast - Evaluation of our offer	Gary Hipple	Throughout 2023	Evaluation report ready in Jan 2024 and informs provision of future breakfast programme.
Commission a new school meals service from September 2023	Gary Hipple/ Lewis Brunton	January – September 2023	New contract and meals service in place for Sept 23.
Support schools to maximise the opportunity provided by the rollout of Universal Free School Meals in London from Sept 23.	Gary Hipple/ Lewis Brunton	June – Dec 2023	Target 85% of children on KS2 to take a school meal.
Support Schools to engage with parents and pupils to provide relevant tools and information that reassures parents, including special diets and allergens.			
Pilots where cooks help to run cooking classes, assemblies to reduce waste.			
Utilising Healthy eating week to campaign for children to take up school meals or having taster sessions.			



# Wandsworth Schools Food Strategy

