

# FUEL SCHOOL FOOD STUDY

Do National School Food Standards help teens eat healthier food?



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM



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## Why did we do this research?

Teens in the UK consume

# 3x

the recommended amount of their total energy intake from free sugars which have a negative effect on health.

In **England** there are **national standards** to ensure that food provided in school contributes to a **healthy and balanced diet**.

## BIG QUESTIONS



How well do secondary schools meet School Food Standards?

What do schools do to support healthy eating?

What are the challenges to providing healthy food in school?



## What did we do?

Researchers at the University of Birmingham have been looking into the food provided in secondary schools and how schools support healthy eating.

They went to

# 36

secondary schools

in the Midlands and spoke to over **2000 young people**, and to **school and catering staff**.



## What did we find out?

### FOOD provision and choices

- **No schools** were fully meeting the School Food Standards.
- **Schools were supportive** of providing nutritious school food. Students could get a **balanced lunchtime meal**.



- **Many schools were serving foods high in fat, sugar, and salt** especially at breakfast and break times. These items were **popular with students!**
- **School students** chose food according to **taste, value-for-money, and convenience**.



### EATING environment

Some students found their school canteen to be **busy and stressful**.

Pupils felt **rushed** to buy their food in over **70% of schools**.



Both students and school staff spoke about **students bringing in foods and drinks high in sugar** from outside of school. School catering teams and some school students wanted a **range of appealing and healthy choices**. But caterers sometimes found it **difficult to provide** only **healthy choices** due to **concerns about financial viability** and **student preferences**.

# TALKING and LEARNING about food

Many students were not included in conversations about school food.

1/4

schools offered **meaningful opportunities** for pupils to give **feedback on school food**.

9/10

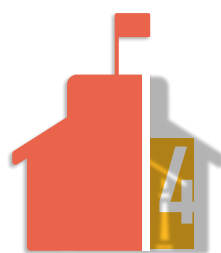
schools taught **healthy eating** across subjects in the curriculum. However, school **staff felt that food education was not always given much focus** within a busy curriculum.

**Students** in some schools thought that **education on food and healthy eating was patchy** and healthy eating messages were **not consistent**.



## Food and school LEADERSHIP

In some schools, the leaders and governors did not see the monitoring of the school food standards as a main part of their role.



**4** schools, governors **didn't monitor** school **meal uptake**.

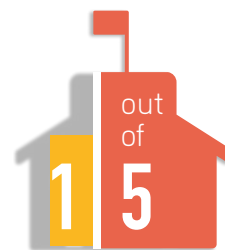
School leaders did not review compliance with the **School Food Standards** in nearly



**4** out of **5** schools.



**1** out of **10** schools had a **whole school food policy**.



**1** out of **5** schools had a **school food quality award**.



School staff and governors had **low awareness** of the **national recommendations for actions by schools to support healthy eating** that are outlined in the **School Food Plan**.

# What does this mean?



School Food Standards are not being fully met in secondary schools – **standards may need to be adapted to better suit the way food is provided in secondary schools.**

**Challenges** to meeting the standards are food provision outside of lunch and **providing popular foods to ensure a financially viable service.**

**Better communication** between school students, management and catering teams will **help to make positive changes to school food provision.**



Schools are **trying** their best **to support and encourage healthy eating** but are **struggling to create a healthy eating culture.**

**Home, and the wider community,** as well as schools, **are important environments** that **can positively influence young people** to have healthy diets.



# What NEXT?

The research team are working with policy makers, young people, parents, schools, caterers and other key people to think about what solutions can be put in place to improve the food provided in secondary schools and help schools to further support their students to have healthy diets.

**Want to find out more or get involved?**  
**Get in touch at [fuelstudy@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:fuelstudy@contacts.bham.ac.uk)**

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