Establishing a whole school food policy

Contents

Introduction

This guide has been written to help your school develop, write and implement a whole school food policy. It is designed to be easy to follow and based firmly in the context of real school life.

Food has a significant role to play in determining health and wellbeing, establishing social roles and reflecting and shaping the school's ethos and individuals' values.

A key aim of the whole school food policy is to develop healthy eating and drinking activities in your school that can benefit pupils, staff, parents, caterers and others associated with your school.

Benefits of a whole school food policy

A whole school food policy enables your school to develop and maintain a shared philosophy on all aspects of food and drink. It makes a public statement which demonstrates how your school cares for and makes a positive contribution to the health and wellbeing of pupils, staff and other stakeholders. A whole school food policy:

- sets out a coordinated approach to food and drink to increase the availability of healthier options;

- ensures equality of access and participation for all;

- reinforces appropriate messages relating to food and drink, eg ensuring consistency between the formal curriculum and school food and drink provision;

- engages the entire school community in taking part in the policy development, usually through a school council or school nutrition action group (SNAG), eg pupils, staff, parents, governors and community partners;

- establishes effective school-caterer, teacher-parent working partnerships, working towards a common goal;

- ensures greater sustainability through planned action as part of the school's development plan;

- communicates your school's shared vision, ethos and values to pupils, staff, parents, and other stakeholders (including the wider community).

What is a whole school food policy?

A whole school food policy is a shared, evolving document for all stakeholders that interact with your school. It expresses a common vision of the ethos, status and role of all aspects of nutrition within your school. In particular, it aims to develop a coherent approach to healthy eating activities in your school. It also encourages all aspects of food and drink to be brought together, clearly, coherently and consistently, including:

- the formal curriculum, eg the arts, science and technology, personal development and mutual understanding, and continued professional development for staff;

- extra curricular activities, eg cookery club, school food gardens;

- participation in national and regional events and initiatives, eg healthy break schemes, Healthy Schools, Water in Cool in School and Young Cook of the Year.

- provision of food and drink at school, eg breakfast clubs, tuck shop, school lunch, vending, water consumption and use of food and drink as a reward;

- consumption of food and drink at school, eg the dining room environment, service style, queues, pupils bringing food to schools, lunchboxes (including information for parents) and commercial food vans;

- promotion of food and drink, including advertising and sponsorship;

- events and lettings at school, eg school fairs;

- pastoral care and welfare issues, eg behaviour, free school meals.

The process of developing a policy facilitates discussion, provides a clear audit of the role and profile of food and drink in any school and engages all stakeholders towards its successful establishment. Arguably, the process is more important than the final document since it helps establish ownership.

Establishing a policy is key to improving the health and wellbeing of your school. It is also an important aspect, with good working practices, that helps schools work towards being a healthy school. Once your school has established its own whole school food policy, targeted, coordinated approaches can then be put into action.

Step by step plan

1. Getting started

Do the head teacher, senior management team and board of governors support a whole school food policy? Do you have a vision? Do they share the vision?

What are the perceived priorities in your school? Nutrition may not be high on your agenda. However, as an area of study, and as a basic requirement for life, it can have a positive influence on school attainment, behaviour, punctuality and wellbeing.

Do teaching and non-teaching staff generally feel that this is something they can share? Do they understand that everyone is involved and will have responsibilities for implementing and monitoring the policy? What do pupils and parents think?

A working group could be assembled to oversee the policy writing and consultation. School councils and SNAGs are successful models that many schools use throughout the country. The initial stages of development could be undertaken by a small representative core group, eg teachers, pupils, governors, health professionals, community dietitian, school nurse and catering staff. A wider representation of stakeholders may need to be involved at a later stage during consultation, especially pupils and parents.

Things to consider

- Why have a policy?
- What are your perceived needs?
- What are the benefits to the school, pupils, staff and parents?
- Can the school support its implementation and subsistence?
- Who will form the initial working group?

To do

✔ Identify the perceived benefits for the school.
✔ Discuss the concept of a whole school food policy with governors, senior management team and staff.
✔ Create a working group to start the initial development.
✔ Establish a rationale for the policy, ie why do you want one?
✔ Establish the remit for the policy, ie what would you like to achieve?

Step by step plan

2. Conduct an audit of food in school

Assess the extent of nutrition related issues in your school. Conduct an audit of food and drink provision throughout your school. This task may be sub-divided between members of the working group, looking at food and drink provision, the formal curriculum, extra curricular activities and consumption of food and drink at school. It will give a clear indication of the prevalence of healthier eating in school. It will also act as a baseline, against which progress can be monitored at a later date.

Review the results of the audit. Tease out good areas and those in need of improvement. Share this information with the school. Keep all stakeholders informed of progress, eg staff, catering service, governors, parents and pupils.
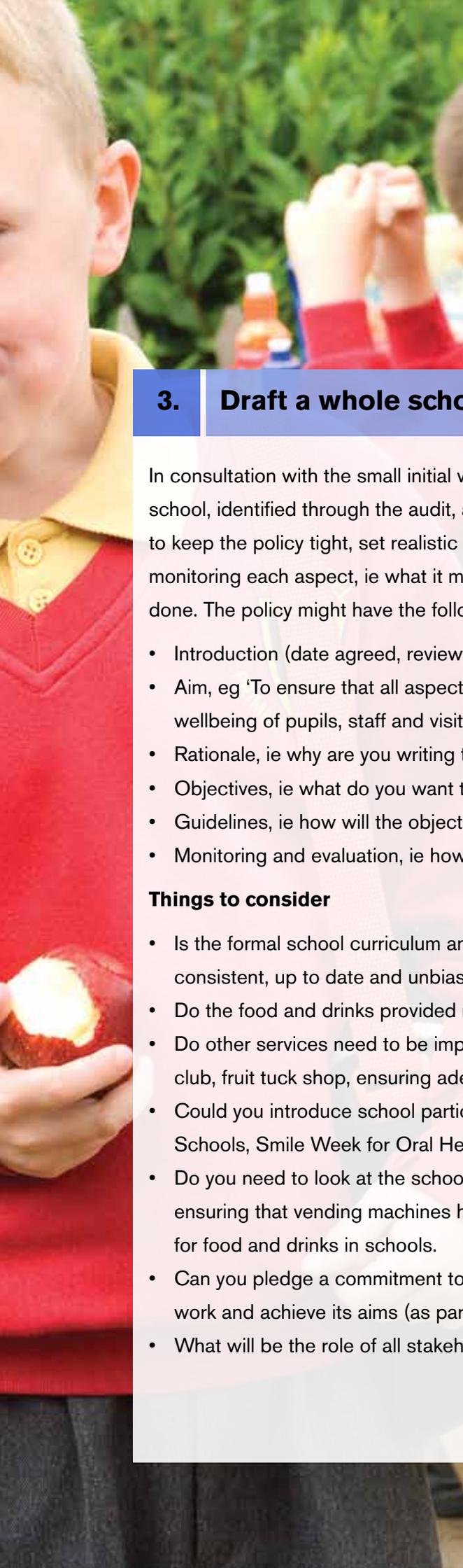
Decide priorities for your school. Consider points for action. How do these relate to your original perceived needs?

Things to consider

- Why conduct an audit?
- Who will you talk to?
- Who will conduct the audit?

To do

✔ Appoint a lead person to oversee this area of work.
✔ Conduct the audit.
✔ Review and publish the results.
✔ Decide on the needs and priorities of your school.
✔ Start to formulate aims and objectives for your policy, based on these priorities.
✔ Establish targets and criteria for success.

3. Draft a whole school food policy

In consultation with the small initial working group, draft a policy that reflects the needs of the school, identified through the audit, and the values in which the school community believes. Try to keep the policy tight, set realistic goals and decide who is responsible for implementing and monitoring each aspect, ie what it means in practice, where, how, when and by whom it will be done. The policy might have the following headings.

- Introduction (date agreed, review date, accessibility rights, where it can be found).
- Aim, eg 'To ensure that all aspects of food and drink in school promote the health and wellbeing of pupils, staff and visitors to our school'.
- Rationale, ie why are you writing the policy?
- Objectives, ie what do you want to achieve?
- Guidelines, ie how will the objectives be met?
- Monitoring and evaluation, ie how will you know whether your objectives are being met?
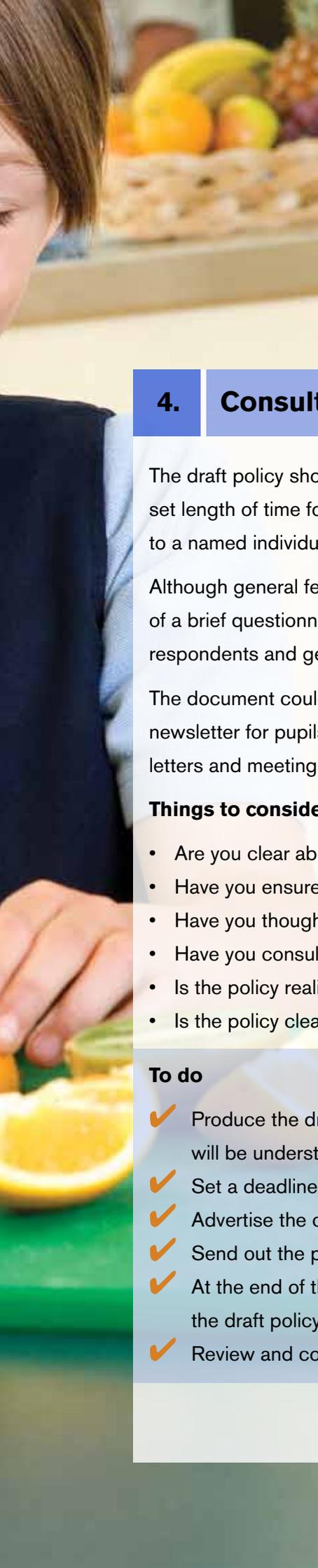
Things to consider

- Is the formal school curriculum and approach to teaching aspects of food and nutrition consistent, up to date and unbiased?
- Do the food and drinks provided meet the nutritional standards for school food?
- Do other services need to be implemented to make your policy work, eg a healthier breakfast club, fruit tuck shop, ensuring adequate provision of drinking water?
- Could you introduce school participation in national schemes or special events, eg Healthy Schools, Smile Week for Oral Health, Water is Cool in School.
- Do you need to look at the school's viewpoint on use and content of vending machines, eg ensuring that vending machines have a range of products that meet the nutritional standards for food and drinks in schools.
- Can you pledge a commitment to staff training and resource provision to make the policy work and achieve its aims (as part of the school development plan)?
- What will be the role of all stakeholders to make the policy work?

Step by step plan

To do

✔ Nominate a group member to write a preliminary draft, in line with the audit results and school vision.

✔ Review at school council or SNAG.

✔ Allow group members, as well as the head teacher and governors, to provide constructive feedback on this draft.

✔ Modify the draft and print copies ready for consultation.

✔ Produce and print a consultation response form.

4. Consult on the draft policy

The draft policy should be made available to all stakeholders that interact with your school. A set length of time for consultation should also be established, with all comments being returned to a named individual, eg the school secretary or principal.

Although general feedback may be welcome, consideration should also be given to the creation of a brief questionnaire for completion and return. This will help to provide a focus for the respondents and generate information that may help determine school priorities and needs.

The document could be made available to all school staff through a briefing, as part of a school newsletter for pupils and parents, and to the wider community through the school's website, letters and meetings.

Things to consider

- Are you clear about the aims and objectives?
- Have you ensured healthier food and drink provision is an integral part of the policy?
- Have you thought through all the consequences?
- Have you consulted widely?
- Is the policy realistic about time, resources and staff?
- Is the policy clear, explicit and straightforward?

To do

✔ Produce the draft policy, or reproduce its aims in a format that will be understood by different stakeholders.

✔ Set a deadline for the consultation process.

✔ Advertise the consultation process.

✔ Send out the policy to stakeholders, with a response form.

✔ At the end of the consultation period, compile responses to the draft policy.

✔ Review and consolidate the comments received.

Step by step plan

5. Modify the draft policy in light of feedback

Look at the feedback and modify the policy in light of suggestions and comments made. Give consideration to each aspect of the feedback, eg what is perceived as good or bad? Ensure that the policy includes an acknowledgement of who was consulted in its production, with a date.

Things to consider

- Does the school have sufficient resources to make the policy work?
- Does the curriculum content and management reflect and endorse healthy eating and drinking messages?
- Do staff require training in aspects of food and nutrition?
- How can the school ensure pupils entitled to free school meals take them?
- Are extracurricular activities desired? If so, is there sufficient funding and enthusiasm?

To do

✔ Discuss the comments received.

✔ Modify the draft policy in light of the consultation.

✔ Get the board of governors and senior management team to sign-off the policy.

✔ Ratify the modified policy at school council or SNAG meeting.

✔ Produce the policy.

6. Disseminate revised policy

The policy should be widely disseminated in different formats, eg a flyer covering the key issues could be produced for parents, and included in the school prospectus or on the school website.

A series of displays should be produced around the school, highlighting different aspects of the policy, eg healthy eating, fruit and vegetables.

Those with the responsibilities of implementation and monitoring should understand what they have to do.

Stakeholders should know that the policy is a group effort that empowers the school to make a difference to the health of all.

The policy should be shared with local cluster school groups or feeder schools – establishing a partnership of understanding.

Things to consider

- Is the policy easy to read and understand?
- Does it need to be translated?
- How will you disseminate the policy?
- Have you produced an effective dissemination plan?

To do

✔ Provide copies of the policy to all school staff, not only teaching staff.

✔ Set up a display representing food topics, eg healthy eating, importance of drinking plenty of water.

✔ Let all stakeholders know about the policy, in a format that will be most easily understood, eg assemblies, staff meetings, school council meetings, a letter for parents, on the school website, in the school newsletter or prospectus and via local newspapers (letting the local community know about how the school cares about health and wellbeing).

Step by step plan

7. Implement policy

Put the policy into action. Let people know what is expected from them in the policy. Ensure that training and resources identified in the policy are provided. Show the school how the policy is being implemented – celebrate your successes.

Things to consider

- What is the best way of implementing the objectives in your policy?
- How will you let different people know what their responsibilities are?

To do

✔ Delegate responsibility for the success of each objective to a group member. Allow them to implement the policy in their specialist area, eg ask a specialist home economics teacher to ensure food and nutrition content is up to date.

✔ Work with all stakeholders to ensure your objectives are being met.

8. Monitor, evaluate and update your policy

At regular intervals, eg annually, the policy should be reappraised in light of developments and changes in school. New targets may need to be set or effort moved to new priorities and challenges. Judge and assess the worth of your policy – a further audit of provision may be necessary.

Things to consider

- Are the objectives in the policy being met? How can you tell? How have you measured outcomes?
- Have there been difficulties? Why have these arisen?
- What have been the successes? What made these possible?
- What do parents and pupils think about the policy? Is it having an effect on food and drink choice, educational attainment, attendance or behaviour?
- Has the school council or SNAG been successful? What has it reported on?
- Are there national initiatives in which the school should participate?
- How can the policy be improved?

To do

✔ Introduce the policy as an agenda item for the board of governors and staff.

✔ Document actions, eg use a digital camera to record what is being done.

✔ Continue to engage all stakeholders, eg set up an open meeting for all stakeholders to share their viewpoints.

✔ Celebrate your successes.

✔ Compile areas of strength and weakness.

✔ Modify the policy and share it with all stakeholders for the next year.

Healthy eating audit checklist

Photocopy and use this checklist as a prompt to carry out a healthy eating audit.

Date of audit:

Number of pupils on roll: % Female: % Male:

% of pupils receiving free school meals:

1. Food provision

Food area	Response/evidence
Healthier breakfast club	
• Is a breakfast club provided? • If not, is there a need? What are the barriers? • If so, are healthy food and drinks provided and promoted? • Does it meet the nutritional standards for other food and drinks in school? • What does it sell? Does it provide choice? Do pupils and staff use it? • Do pupils and staff want to see any changes made to current provision?	
Healthier tuck shop	
• Does your school operate a tuck shop or a healthier break scheme? • If not, is there a need? What are the barriers? • If so, are healthy food and drinks provided and promoted? • Does it meet the nutritional standards for other food and drinks in school? • What does it sell? Does it provide healthy choices? Do pupils and staff use it? • Do pupils and staff want to see any changes made to current provision?	

Healthy eating audit checklist

Food area	Response/evidence
Healthier vending	
• Do you have vending at school?	
• If so, are healthy food and drinks provided and promoted?	
• Does it meet the nutritional standards for other food and drinks in school?	
• What does it sell? Does it provide healthy choices? Do pupils and staff use it?	
• Do pupils and staff want to see any changes made to current provision?	
Healthier lunchboxes	
• Is support provided for pupils and parents about healthier lunchbox choices?	
• If so, what is it?	
• If not, what can the school do to support parents?	
School lunch	
• Do you work with the school catering to review school lunch uptake, choice and cost?	
• Are healthy food and drinks provided and promoted in line with nutritional standards for school lunch?	
• Does the food on offer meet or exceed the minimum standards for school lunches? How do you know?	
• Are pupils entitled to free school meals integrated, or do they have to queue separately for tokens? Do you use a cash or cashless system?	
• Does your school promote school lunch, eg theme days, competitive pricing or healthier eating? If so, how? Is it successful? How do you know?	
• Is training available for catering and dining staff, which supports them to provide healthy options?	
• Is drinking water freely available during lunch time?	

Food area	Response/evidence
Food in the school	

- Where do children eat their packed lunches? Can they sit with their friends or is a special area provided? Where do they store their lunchboxes?
- Does your school dining room provide an attractive, sociable environment? Is there adequate seating?
- What is the school lunch rota and timing? Does this work effectively? How do you know?
- Do staff eat with pupils? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Is the queuing system fair? Are there any difficulties?
- Does your school operate any specific food policy, eg fruit only break times or restricting certain food products?
- If so, why?

Drinking	

- Does your school provide access to drinking water throughout the day? Is it hygienic? Are there sufficient water dispensers available? Are pupils encouraged to drink water and carry water bottles with them? Is special provision made during hot weather or after physical activity?
- Are you aware, and are parents aware of pupil eligibility for subsidised milk through the EU School Milk Subsidy Scheme?

Healthy eating audit checklist

Food area	Response/evidence
General	

- How is nutrition information in different subject areas coordinated and consistent messages ensured, eg within home economics, science and technology?
- How are different aspects of food education financed, eg ingredients?
- Do staff attend continuing professional development to update their skills, knowledge and understanding in food related issues? What about staff teaching aspects of food with no formal training; what support do they receive?

2. Extracurricular activities

	Response/evidence

- Does your school offer extracurricular activities eg growing and cookery clubs? Does your school help fund these activities?
- If yes, list them. Are they well attended? Are they effective?
- Do they support nutritional standards for school food and drink?
- If no, why not? What are the barriers? Would staff, pupils and parents welcome the opportunity?
- Is there the potential to link these activities into the formal school day?

3. Participation in national events

List the national and local schemes or special events in which your school is involved that have a food basis, eg healthy break schemes, Smile Week for Oral Health, Young Cook of the Year. Comment on the success and merit of each.

	Success and merits

4. Events and lettings at school, eg school fair

When the school premises are booked by external organisations, are they made aware of the school's policy?　　Yes ❑　　　No ❑

5. Pastoral care

	Success and merits
• Are strategies in place to address behaviour and bullying, particularly linked around food and lunch-time activities?	
• Are all staff, parents, governors and visitors aware of the policies in dealing with pupil health and wellbeing?	
• Is information, or training, provided to enable staff and parents to have an informed understanding of food issues?	
• Does the school have a procedure for identifying children who are at risk, eg failing to thrive, allergies, eating disorder, overweight or obese, dietary related condition?	
• Does the school promote and monitor the uptake of free school meals?	

6. Promotion

Are the achievements by pupils promoted internally and externally to the wider community?　　　　　Yes ❑　　　No ❑

Sample whole school food policy

Use this sample policy, or modify to suit your aims.

School name:

Date of policy implementation:

Date of next review:

This school actively supports healthy eating and drinking throughout the school day.

This policy document was produced in consultation with the entire school community, including pupils, parents, school staff, governors, education and library board representatives, community dietitian and local school nurses.

Aim

To ensure that all aspects of food and nutrition in school promote the health and wellbeing of pupils, staff and visitors to our school.

Objectives

Our objectives are to:
- Review the formal curriculum to ensure information relating to food and nutrition in different lesson areas is consistent and up to date.
- Work with the school caterer to trial a healthier breakfast club, serving a range of items.
- Establish a food week in school to promote healthy eating and drinking messages.
- Ensure that teachers who are taking responsibility for food in the classroom have basic food hygiene training.

Action

We will meet our objectives by:
- Discussing at school council. Setting up a sub-group or SNAG to monitor change.
- Formal curriculum: setting up a working group to audit food based topics across general learning areas.
- Healthier breakfast club: working with school caterer on a menu of breakfast options at a reasonable cost. Publicising club in school newsletter, plus through poster advertising in the corridors.
- Food week: running fruit and veg taster sessions. Having a food related competition.
- Linking with health promoting national events, such as Smile Week for Oral Health, World Cancer Awareness etc.
- Continuing professional development: sending teacher in charge of food on a one day basic food hygiene course.

Monitoring and evaluation

We will monitor and evaluate progress through:

- SNAG: reporting on progress to the school council and reviewing policy annually in light of improvement and changes.

- Formal curriculum: teachers being able to identify food based topics through schemes of work.

- Healthier breakfast club: school caterer reporting on the number of pupils using service. Asking pupils, parents and teachers their thoughts about the club and the range of food provided.

- Food week: head teacher presenting certificates or prizes in school assembly. Displaying photographs at parents' evening.

- Extra-curricular: producing a club recipe book, reports and photographs posted on the school website.

Sources of further information

The following list provides links to further resources and information that may support you in developing your whole school food policy.

Healthy Schools

www.publichealth.hscni.net
A Healthy Schools toolkit will be available soon on this website to assist school development planning for health and wellbeing, taking a whole school approach.

Food in Schools

www.foodinschools.org
The Food in Schools website, for England, provides additional support information for writing a whole school food policy, as well as plenty of links to sources of further information.

Grab 5!

www.sustainweb.org
Provides top tips and practical advice on setting up a range of activities that promote healthier eating, including developing a school food policy and setting up a SNAG.

Health Education Trust

www.healthedtrust.com
Health Education Trust is a registered charity, formed to promote the development of health education for young people in the UK. The site contains information about whole school food policies and school nutrition action groups.

Extended schools

www.deni.gov.uk
Schools are helping to improve pupils' health by providing breakfast clubs and healthier breaks under the DE extended schools programme. Visit the School Improvement section of the website for further information.

Food Standards Agency

www.food.gov.uk
Food policy in schools: A strategic policy framework for governing bodies can be found at the FSA website. Although mainly applicable to England, there are areas of relevance for governors in Northern Ireland.