

NUTRITIONAL STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL LUNCHES AND OTHER SCHOOL FOOD

**FINAL DECISIONS ON THE REPORT OF THE SCHOOL MEALS
REVIEW PANEL ON SCHOOL LUNCHES AND THE ADVICE OF
THE SCHOOL FOOD TRUST ON OTHER SCHOOL FOOD**

Introduction

1. In September 2005 the Government received recommendations from the School Meals Review Panel (SMRP) on school lunches and on a number of wider issues concerning food in schools. In response to that report – Turning the Tables – the newly-established School Food Trust (SFT) was commissioned to advise Ministers on standards for food in school other than lunch.

2. The DfES consulted widely on the recommendations of the SMRP and on a more limited basis on the advice of the SFT. Reports on the responses to each of those consultations are available at:

www.dfes.gov.uk/consultations/conresults.cfm?consultationId=1319

3. Having considered responses to those consultations and taken into account the many representations the Department has received on these issues from a range of stakeholders, the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has arrived at final decisions on the standards. These standards will apply to school lunches and other food provided in all local authority maintained schools in England. This report sets out, at Annexes A to C, what those standards will be and, at Annex D, the Government's response to the other recommendations made by the SMRP about school food.

Nutritional standards for school lunches

4. The Government endorses the recommendations of the SMRP on the nutritional standards that should apply to school lunches with some minor amendments. This means that there will be two sets of standards for school lunches:

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

Annex A sets out interim food-based standards for school lunches from September 2006 (for primary, secondary and special schools).

Annex B sets out nutrient-based standards for school lunches from September 2008 (primary schools) or September 2009 (secondary and special schools)

Annex C sets out food-based standards for school lunches from September 2008 (primary schools) or September 2009 (secondary and special schools)

Standards for all school food other than lunches

5. The Government has also decided that similar standards should apply to all school food other than lunches, as recommended by the School Food Trust.

6. This means that:

- a. no confectionery will be sold in schools;
- b. no bagged savoury snacks other than nuts and seeds (without added salt or sugar) will be sold in schools;
- c. a variety of fruit and vegetables should be available in all school food outlets. This could include fresh, dried, frozen, canned or juiced varieties;
- d. children and young people must have easy access at all times to free, fresh drinking water in schools;

NB – in guidance, we will make clear that it would be preferable for this drinking water to be chilled; and for it to be located so that children do not have to depend on going to the lavatory to access it;

- e. the only other drinks available will be:
 - i) water (still or sparkling);
 - ii) milk (skimmed or semi-skimmed);
 - iii) pure fruit juices;
 - iv) yoghurt and milk drinks (with less than 5% added sugar);
 - v) drinks made from combinations of (i) to (iv) above;
 - vi) low calorie hot chocolate;
 - vii) tea; and
 - viii) coffee.

NB – Artificial sweeteners could be used only in yoghurt and milk drinks; or combinations containing yoghurt or milk.

Timing

7. The Government agrees with the SMRP that the food-based standards for school lunches should come into force from September 2006 and that the nutrient-based standards should come into force in primary schools in September 2008 and in secondary and special schools in September 2009.

8. The Government has also decided that the standards for other school food will be introduced from September 2006 although they will not become law until September 2007. All schools should start now to make the changes needed to meet the new standards in anticipation of this change in the law.

9. In order to support schools, DfES and SFT will work with schools that have moved or are moving to providing healthier food in vending machines and tuckshops; and with industry players, to identify effective ways of making changes to provision and educating pupils about making healthier choices.

Legal implementation

10. Powers in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 already allow the Government to prescribe nutritional standards, or other nutritional requirements, for school lunches for registered pupils at maintained schools. In addition, the Education and Inspections Bill, currently going through Parliament, will enable us to set standards for all food provided in schools.

11. On the basis of the existing legislation, regulations came into force in 2001 based upon food groups (fruit and vegetables; starchy foods; meat, fish and other non dairy sources of protein; milk and dairy foods; and foods containing fat and foods containing sugar).

12. The new nutrient-based and food-based standards for school lunches are designed (in combination) to replace the 2001 regulations. However, given the staggered start dates for the nutrient-based and food-based standards, it will be necessary, in order to avoid a relaxation in standards overall, to put in place a set of interim standards which encompass the new food-based standards but which do not lose the necessary elements of the 2001 standards.

13. After Royal Assent for the Education and Inspections Bill, these regulations will be replaced by a new set of regulations encompassing the interim lunch standards; the food other than lunch standards and the final food-based and nutrient-based standards.

14. In summary the following regulations will be made:

a. **Interim regulations for food-based standards for school lunches in place for September 2006.**

To ensure no relaxation in overall standards ahead of the introduction of nutrient-based standards in 2008/2009, the food-based standards proposed by the SMRP will be meshed with existing 2001 requirements.

These interim standards will retain or boost existing standards on fruit/vegetables; meat/fish/other protein; starchy foods; and milk/dairy foods.

But new requirements will:

- i) require regular oily fish;
- ii) set minimum meat content levels and ban the use of a

specified range of offal in manufactured meat products;

- iii) require bread to be available daily;
- iv) reduce the use of deep frying;
- v) limit available drinks to:
 - water (still or sparkling);
 - milk (skimmed or semi-skimmed);
 - pure fruit juices;
 - yoghurt and milk drinks (with less than 5% added sugar);
 - drinks made from combinations of those in bullet points 1 to 4 (eg. smoothies);
 - low calorie hot chocolate;
 - tea; and
 - coffee.

NB – Artificial sweeteners could be used only in yoghurt and milk drinks; or combinations containing yoghurt or milk.

- vi) ban confectionery; and
- vii) allow only unsweetened/unsalted nuts, seeds, fruit and vegetables as snacks.

b. Regulations for all food other than lunches in place for September 2007.

These regulations will be made after Royal Assent for the Education and Inspections Bill.

However we expect schools to make the changes now in anticipation of this change in the law.

These standards will, across the school day, ban the sale of confectionery; ban savoury snacks other than unsalted/unsweetened nuts and seeds; and limit available drinks (in the same way as set out above for lunches).

c. Regulations for food-based and nutrient-based standards for school lunches in place for September 2008 (primary schools) and September 2009 (secondary and special schools).

When the nutrient-based standards come into force it will be alongside food-based standards as set out at Annex C. The

interim meshed standards (as set out at Annex A) will have then served their purpose.

The nutrient-based standards set out the proportion of nutrients that children and young people should receive from a school lunch, covering energy, protein, carbohydrate, non-milk extrinsic sugars, fat, saturated fat, fibre, sodium, vitamin A, vitamin C, folate/folic acid, calcium, iron and zinc.

Guidance

15. The SFT will shortly publish guidance on the interim food-based standards for school lunches which will come into force in September 2006. The SFT will produce additional guidance in September on the standards for other school food.

16. The DfES has also published guidance for schools and local authorities on procurement arrangements and contracts.

DfES
May 2006

ANNEX A

INTERIM FOOD-BASED STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL LUNCHES FROM SEPTEMBER 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 - 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.

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>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>
Deep-fried foods	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.
Milk and dairy foods – includes milk, cheese, yoghurt (including frozen and drinking yoghurt), fromage frais, and custard	A food from this group should be available on a daily basis.
Drinks	<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>
Water	There should be easy access at all times to free, fresh drinking water.

Salt and condiments	<p>Table salt should not be made available.</p> <p>If made available, condiments should be available only in sachets.</p>
Confectionery and savoury snacks	<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>

ANNEX B

NUTRIENT-BASED STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL LUNCHES FROM SEPTEMBER 2008 (PRIMARY SCHOOLS) OR SEPTEMBER 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.

Energy	30% of the estimated average requirement (EAR) ¹
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</i>
Sodium	Not more than 30% of the SACN ² 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. Half the population will have needs greater than this, and half will be below this amount

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. For details of figures for the dietary reference values and derived amounts for nutrients for children and young people see Crawley (2005), with the exception that the derived reference value for fibre for boys aged 15-18 years should be capped at 18g.

¹ Nutrient values except for sodium are based on: Department of Health (1991) Dietary Reference Values for Food Energy and Nutrients for the United Kingdom. London: HMSO

² Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (2003) Salt and Health. London: The Stationery Office

ANNEX C

FOOD-BASED STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL LUNCHES FROM SEPTEMBER 2008 (PRIMARY SCHOOLS) OR SEPTEMBER 2009 (SECONDARY AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS)

Fruit and vegetables – these include fruit and vegetables in all forms (whether fresh, frozen, canned, dried or in the form of juice)	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).
Oily fish	Oily fish shall be available at least once every three weeks
Manufactured meat products	<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.
Bread	Bread should be available on a daily basis.
Deep-fried foods	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.

Drinks	<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>
Water	<p>There should be easy access at all times to free, fresh drinking water.</p>
Salt and condiments	<p>Table salt should not be made available.</p> <p>If made available, condiments should be available only in sachets.</p>
Confectionery and savoury snacks	<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>

**THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE SCHOOL MEALS REVIEW
PANEL (SMRP) RECOMMENDATIONS ON OTHER ISSUES**

Recommendation 3: Schools should aspire to achieve the highest quality of provision, which is a hot meal, cooked on-site, from fresh and seasonal ingredients. Whilst we accept that this level of provision is not possible to achieve in all schools at present, we recommend that schools work towards this.

Response

The SMRP itself acknowledges that this is an aim that schools should aspire to but that this level of provision may not be possible to achieve in all schools at present. While we agree that schools should consider whether this level of provision is possible, our priority is that pupils should be offered healthy school food that meets the nutritional standards we are setting, however this is achieved.

Recommendation 4: At present only the school lunch standards are statutory. The Panel recommends that pre-school and young people in other settings, should be similarly protected.

Response

Our nutritional standards will cover all local authority maintained primary, secondary and special schools.

We are currently consulting on The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework, which will place on providers a specific welfare requirement that 'children are provided with nutritious food and drink to meet their needs'. The EYFS will also include good practice for providers. Providers will be directed to a range of information about nutritional standards, including the updated Caroline Walker Trust guidance on which the new school meals standards are modelled.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) has provided a grant to the Caroline Walker Trust, to update its guidance "*Eating Well for Under-5s in Child Care*", associated menu planner software and training pack, to ensure these materials are brought into line with current nutritional recommendations (eg. new salt targets).

We are currently considering whether we can build on this work and develop new guidance materials for food and drink in early years settings.

Recommendation 6: School caterers should ensure that choice is available for all young people right through to the end of lunchtime service in order that young people eating later in the food service are not disadvantaged.

We are clear that choice is important but need also to consider the possible costs which could be incurred through food wastage. The School Food Trust will offer guidance on this point, to the effect that “sufficient food must be available until the end of the lunch service to enable children to choose a healthy, well-balanced meal.”

Recommendation 8: The procurement of food served in schools should be consistent with sustainable development principles and schools and caterers should look to local farmers and suppliers for their produce where possible, tempered by a need for menus to meet the new nutritional standards and be acceptable in schools.

Response

We agree that this is an aim that schools and caterers should aspire to. But we also recognise that it may not be possible or indeed practical for all schools, especially those in urban areas. We would, however, encourage schools and local authorities to consider how they can meet sustainable development principles.

Our procurement guidance contains advice on sourcing ingredients using local suppliers and we are developing the guidance further following discussions with the National Audit Office.

Recommendation 9: The standards should be reviewed in 2011. At this time the standards should be applied to food consumption as well as food provision.

We agree that the impact of the new standards should be fully evaluated, and will consider the timing and scope of this in due course, on the basis of experience as the new standards come into force.

Recommendation 10: The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) should encourage schools to adopt the voluntary nutrient specifications circulated for consultation by the Food Standards Agency.

The FSA's target nutrient specifications are being published alongside the new school food standards. We encourage schools to regard these as helpful guidance when determining compliance with the standards, particularly as they work up to statutory adoption of nutrient-based minimum standards.

Recommendation 11: Schools and caterers should conduct a needs analysis (skills, equipment, preparation time) and train all relevant staff (including catering staff and midday supervisors) to ensure they are able to support pupils in making healthy choices.

Response

Many schools and caterers have already carried out a needs analysis of their school meals provision. Many more are training catering staff. We would encourage all schools and caterers to consider doing so.

A level 1 qualification in providing a healthier meals service has been available since September 2005. The aim of the qualification is to enable school caterers to improve pupil nutritional intake from all food provided by the school meals service; and to know how to market and promote healthier choices to pupils.

We are currently developing qualifications at levels 2 and 3. This will include looking at the skills needs for different roles in the kitchen and on the barriers to catering staff attaining qualifications.

Recommendation 12: Catering staff need to be central to the whole school approach. Their practical skills should be valued and utilised to the full, and they should be represented on groups like School Nutrition Action Groups.

Response

We agree that catering staff must be central to the whole school approach and will seek to encourage schools and caterers to make this a priority.

Recommendation 13: All schools should audit their current food service and curriculum, and develop, implement and publish a whole-school food and nutrition policy. The Panel recommends that schools' whole-school food policies should be made available to parents and carers and be referred to in the school prospectus and school profile.

Response

There is an expectation that all schools will be participating in the Healthy Schools Scheme by the end of 2009. The Healthy Schools Programme's compulsory Healthy Eating strand requires schools to adopt a whole school food policy, developed through wide consultation, implemented, monitored and evaluated for impact. The joint DfES/Department of Health Food in Schools programme provides advice for schools on developing a 'whole school food policy' which links what is taught across the curriculum with the food provided for children to eat at school, to ensure that consistent

messages about healthy food choices run throughout all aspects of school life.

Recommendation 14: All young people should be taught food preparation and practical cooking skills in school in the context of healthy eating. Far more emphasis should be placed on practical cooking skills within the curriculum space currently devoted to Food Technology, and the KS3 review should consider this.

Response

We agree that there should be a strong focus on practical food skills in food technology as part of the KS3 review of the National Curriculum. The Qualifications and Curriculum Agency (QCA) are consulting with key partners to integrate the 'food competences' recommended by DfES and the FSA in the curriculum programmes of study. The competences cover:

- Diet and health
- Consumer awareness
- Food preparation and handling skills
- Food hygiene and safety

We have also asked QCA to develop GCSE criteria that encourage an emphasis on diet, nutrition and practical food work, against which specifications for food technology, home economics and catering courses would be presented to Awarding Bodies.

Recommendation 15: Supply links between local producers and schools should be strengthened, with improvements to young people's knowledge about growing and cooking food. Schools should be encouraged to visit farms, ideally where some of their food is produced.

Response

The DfES Growing Schools programme set up in 2002, provides the link between those working in the food, farming and countryside sector and schools. The Growing Schools website, which currently receives half of all Teachernet users, hosts the most comprehensive database available of farms offering educational visit opportunities to schools. This database has been compiled by the Access to Farms consortium, a coalition of all the key Non Government Organisations, agencies and government bodies working in this area. Over the past two years the consortium has also developed an accreditation scheme to quality assess both the farm premises and farmers to ensure they are of an agreed standard. As of September, all accredited farms will be flagged on the website. Any future activity will seek to build on this foundation.

Growing Schools works very closely with many organisations from this sector, particularly Farming and Countryside Education (FACE), with whom we have

already undertaken several pieces of research relating to the pupils understanding of food and where it comes from, and are about to embark on two further research projects. The recent partnership between Growing Schools, Aardman (Wallace and Gromit) and Dreamworks resulted in an extremely successful competition, 'The Great Vegetable Challenge'. This aimed to encourage schools interested in using the school grounds as a place to grow food and learn about where food comes from, yet also highlighted just how much progress many schools have already made in this area, demonstrating strong links to the Healthy Schools Standards.

Recommendation 16: Whole-school food policies, developed through partnerships, should include consideration of the impact of packed lunches and food brought into school. However, where parents and carers wish to continue with packed lunches, guidance is available from the Food Standards Agency.

Response

The impact of packed lunches and food brought into schools are matters for schools to consider. However, the School Food Trust and the Food Standards Agency will be producing further guidance on packed lunches in the autumn.

Recommendation 18: Schools and local authorities should aim for complete take-up of free school meal entitlement; and schools should aim to have at least 10% increase in school meals take-up by the end of the implementation period.

Response

Increasing the take-up of school meals is clearly essential if the school meals service is to remain sustainable and schools and local authorities will want to set targets to ensure that this is achieved. One of the SFT's objectives is to work with schools, local authorities and others to understand and, where possible, overcome the barriers to transforming school food and develop a strategy to increase demand for healthier food in schools and at local authority level.

The SFT has a target to increase the national take-up of school meals by 4 percentage points by March 2008; and by 10 percentage points by autumn 2009.

Recommendation 19: Further tools and guidance need to be developed, tested, and made available as early in the implementation process as possible. The DfES should take the lead on this.

Response

The SFT is producing guidance that will support the new nutritional standards for school lunches and other school food.

Recommendation 20: The Food Standards Agency (FSA) should make its food composition data, including any relating to non-milk extrinsic sugars (NMES), widely available in an electronic format. This will provide information on foods and nutrients contained in the standards, expressed using analytical or calculation methods which reflect the needs of the standards.

Response

McCance & Widdowson's 'Composition of Foods' is widely available in an electronic format, however it does not provide data on NMES. Nutrient analytical tools that use the latest version, the 6th edition, will contain the most up to date information available.

All the data the FSA holds on NMES in foods is available in electronic format, although they do not include information on all manufactured foods used in school meals, nor do they address individual recipes developed by different caterers.

Recommendation 21: The Secretary of State should take note of our concerns that low income families may be adversely affected by price increases, and investigate options for mitigating possible nutritional and economic risks.

Response

We do note the concerns of the SMRP about the possible impact on low income families of increases in the price of a school meal. The children of low income families will be entitled to a Free School Meal and we have no plans to change the existing threshold for defining a Free School Meals pupil. We will, however, introduce systems which will simplify the application process for, and remove any perceived stigma attached to, free school meals, which may currently prevent families from applying.

Recommendation 22: Schools and local authorities must improve transparency and accountability in relation to how much they spend on school meals, including food cost per meal; uptake; free school meal numbers; nature of service; level of any subsidy; and any surplus generated by the service and how it is spent. This information should be presented in the whole-school food policy.

Response

We agree that schools and local authorities should seek to provide greater transparency and accountability on what is spent on school meals and make that information widely available. At a national level, the SFT has plans to work with key stakeholders to develop better data collection systems.

Recommendation 23: There should be no further degradation of service or provision by individual schools or local authorities from the current position, and kitchens should be a priority under 'Building Schools for the Future'. The DfES should undertake further work to consider the options for schools which no longer have their own kitchens. Schools and local authorities should be encouraged to reach the highest standards of provision and kitchens should be a priority in all schools' capital investment programmes.

Response

Capital funding for schools this year is £5.5 billion and it will rise to £8.0 billion by 2010-11. Much of this funding is allocated to local authorities and to schools for their local needs and priorities, which should reflect government priorities. Our guidance on capital programmes includes the priority that we give to improving school food.

Building Schools for the Future aims to renew all secondary schools in fifteen waves of investment, starting from this year. Funding includes provision for improving kitchen and dining facilities to modern standards.

Recommendation 24: Guidance on formulaic funding delivered to local authorities and schools should prioritise the renovation and refurbishment of kitchens and dining facilities.

Response

Our capital guidance to schools and authorities already reflects the priority which we give to the improvement of school kitchens and dining areas.

Recommendation 25: The Government needs to ensure that current Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts and 'Building Schools for the Future' (BSF) initiatives do not impose barriers to the improvement of school food and also ensure that in future all school PFIs incorporate building specifications which enable the main meal to be cooked on the premises and practical cooking skills to be taught to all pupils. The Government should require all partners in PFI deals to be bound by the new standards. The existence of long-term contracts cannot be allowed to adversely affect the health of pupils in PFI schools.

Response

No school contract, including PFI contracts, should adversely affect the health of pupils. We have ensured that recently signed PFI contracts which include catering provision fully support our aims of improving the quality of school catering and will deliver our nutritional and food targets. All PFI contracts should also include a five-yearly benchmarking review of the delivery of services including catering.

Where earlier PFI contracts include catering services are not delivering a satisfactory meals service, we urge the authority and the contractor to work together to bring about improvement. The Treasury has recently announced the formation of a cross-government PFI Taskforce to improve the delivery and operation of PFI contracts.

We have also included in our procurement guidance advice that is aimed at helping managers to make variations to existing contracts.

Recommendation 26: The Panel suggests that kitchens and dining areas should be given priority within primary capital investment.

Response

In his 2005 Budget, the Chancellor announced that additional funding would be available from 2008-09 to support the renewal of primary schools, with the aim of renewing at least half in the next fifteen years.

Details of the new primary capital programme were announced in March of this year. Additional capital will be available from 2008-2009 with the aim of renewing half of all primary schools in the next 15 years. Published aims of the programme include appropriate kitchen and dining facilities to raise nutritional standards and increase uptake of school meals.

Recommendation 27: The economic costs of the changes should be modelled against the economic benefits. For example the benefits include: sourcing more food from local suppliers will benefit local economies and cut down transport and infrastructure costs; using more fresh ingredients will require longer kitchen assistant hours and this will benefit catering staff; the possible link between better nutrition, educational attainment and associated life-time earnings gain.

Response

The FSA have commissioned a systematic review of diet and dietary change on school age children's behaviour – anticipated publication in summer 2006.

In addition, one of the SFT's agreed objectives is to deliver by July 2007 an authoritative academic study of the health, educational, behavioural and economic costs and benefits of investing in good school food.

Recommendation 28: DfES has asked all local authorities to revise their asset management plan data by the end of this year. This information should show-up deficiencies in kitchen and dining areas but will not, due to timing, reflect the standards and approach recommended in this report. We recommend that DfES should (i) consider what further work needs to be done to supplement the information gathered from current activity; (ii) use this information to ensure that kitchen and dining areas are a priority in capital spending programmes; and (iii) ensure that all future asset planning takes the new SMRP standards and approach fully into account.

Response

We aim to revise guidance on asset management planning later this year, which will fully reflect our priorities on school food standards.

Recommendation 29: In line with the Government's expectation that the transformation of school meals should be led by local authorities, we recommend that local level discussions recognise the desirability of phased – as opposed to sudden – price increases.

Response

The price of a school meal is a matter for local determination. We would however encourage local authorities to consider the rate of any increase when deciding on any price rises.

Recommendation 30: The Government should make school meals a priority during the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007.

Response

We have already allocated £220m to support the improvement of school food until March 2008. While all Government spending decisions are consequent on the Comprehensive Spending Review, we remain committed to supporting schools and local authorities in providing healthy food for pupils.

Recommendation 31: At appropriate intervals (eg. of 4 years) a nationwide evaluation of school food provision should be commissioned by DfES, to assess the types of foods and drinks available, their uptake and nutrient contribution to the overall diet. The evaluation should pay particular attention to provision for young people who are nutritionally at risk. This evaluation should be timed for completion before the review of the standards in 2011.

Response

DfES plans to evaluate school food provision no earlier than 2009, when the nutrient-based standards come into place in secondary and special schools.

The SFT is planning to undertake an annual survey of school meals provision to monitor progress locally. We have also asked the SFT to consider the scope for rationalising the various surveys undertaken during the course of a year into a single exercise in order to ease the burden on local authorities.

Recommendation 32: The main approach to external monitoring and evaluation should be through the regular inspections carried out by Ofsted. This should be supported by evidence gathered from the in-depth inspections of a sample of schools carried out by HM Inspectors, supported by nutritionists. The Panel recommends further work should be conducted by Ofsted and DfES to use the pilot inspections planned for November 2005 to develop the methodology and a rigorous set of tools to support those inspections.

Response

Ofsted are already inspecting schools' approaches to healthy eating as part of the new inspection framework for schools. Ofsted have also carried out three pilot thematics, accompanied by nutritionists, looking at the standard of food provided in a sample of schools. A report of their findings was published in March. Further thematics are planned for next year.

Recommendation 33: A checklist should be developed, as part of the package of further tools and guidance. It should be piloted to ensure it is effective in bringing about change and supporting implementation of the nutrient and food standards.

Response

The SFT are considering this as part of their work on the guidance on nutritional standards.

Recommendation 34: Local authorities should be required to collect and report annually on progress in achieving healthy school standards, provision and uptake of all (including free) school lunches, and steps being taken to work towards the achievement of school lunch standards e.g. use of nutrition software, checklists, smartcards, incorporation of standards in contracts. The DfES should collect and collate this data to provide a national overview of progress.

Response

The SFT is planning to undertake an annual survey of school meals provision to monitor progress locally. We have also asked the SFT to consider the scope for rationalising the various surveys undertaken during the course of a year into a single exercise in order to ease the burden on local authorities.

Recommendation 35: The School Food Trust should hold a database of standards compliant menus for schools to use at their discretion; and standard analysis services which would support schools in providing and analysing their own meals service.

Response

The SFT is compiling menus as part of its guidance on the standards.