

IMPROVING SCHOOL MEALS AT TOWERBANK
SUMMARY REPORT BY TOWERBANK PARENT COUNCIL
JUNE 2016

MAKING SURE OUR CHILDREN EAT WELL AT SCHOOL

What children eat is universally recognised as a major influence on how they grow, learn, develop and behave. Nutritious, appetising food enjoyed in a pleasant environment is something all schools aspire to. This is supported by Government policy, most recently *Better Eating, Better Learning* (2014). Perhaps the biggest indicator of the Scottish Government's recognition of the importance of nutrition is the provision of free school meals to all P1-P3 pupils from January 2015.

The policies laid down by the Government and celebrated by schools and parents alike are good in theory. But the practice – actually delivering healthy food that children want to eat – is a different story at Towerbank Primary School.

Earlier this year, the school talked to us about school lunches at Towerbank. The simple fact was that the school lunches provided were not delivering on these ideals. The food was frequently unappetising, not enjoyed by the children and a significant volume ended up as waste.

This is a summary report of our response, the council's reaction to our findings and the changes that have since been made.

THE PROVISION OF SCHOOL MEALS ACROSS EDINBURGH

There are three providers of school lunches in Edinburgh. Our provider, Edinburgh Catering Services (who cater for the majority of primary schools – with and without kitchens on site – in the city), states that their school meals offer: healthy choices, at least two portions of fruit and vegetables every day and oily fish (every three weeks). The menu that outlines food choices, is, on paper, one that offers tasty and nutritionally balanced food. However, the menu does not account for interpretation by different kitchens and the fact that for some schools, like ours, the food is cooked in one place, transported and then served in another. There can be a significant time delay between cooking and eating of up to four hours. This was (and remains) the overriding issue at Towerbank – that food is cooked at Portobello High School and delivered into school.

TOWERBANK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Towerbank is the second largest primary school in Edinburgh with a role of 642 pupils. Around 300 pupils have school lunches every day they are served, with the majority of the school population opting to bring their own packed lunches. No-one eats off site. When we look at the breakdown of school meals for a typical week, it shows that the uptake of school meals falls off significantly as the children grow older.

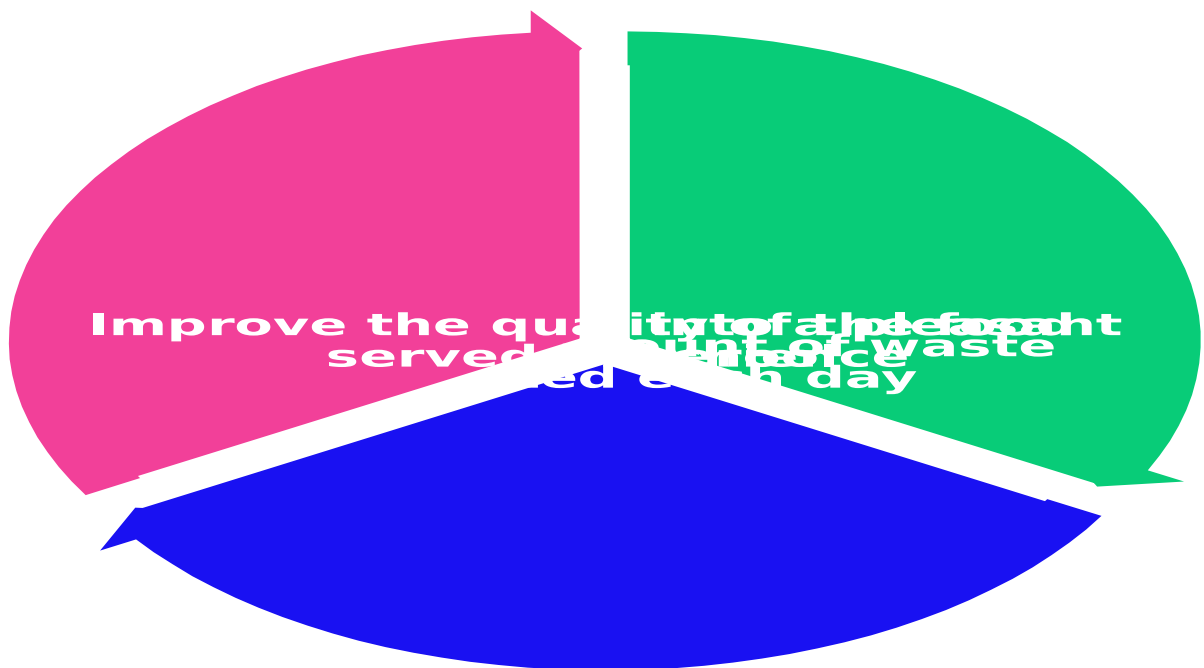
Data for week commencing 16th May 2016

Year Group	Number of hot meals ordered for the week	% of year group eating school meals
P1	264	70%
P2	313	74%
P3	236	67%
P4	122	32%
P5	142	39%
P6	54	16%
P7	70	20%

Although less than half of the pupils eat school meals, the challenges the school face in serving this volume of children in an overcrowded space are immeasurable, and it is to their credit that everyone is fed, calmly and without too much fuss, every lunchtime.

Currently hot meals are served from two locations within the school, the lower hall on the ground floor and the middle hall on the first floor. The size of the school population at Towerbank has meant that an extension to the dining facilities is essential to meet more effectively the needs of such a large school and in July 2016 work will begin on the extension to the dining room. This will also involve relocation of the kitchen area / servery to what is currently a classroom for P1 pupils.

The school acknowledges that currently lunchtime is a 'military operation'. The restrictions placed upon them leave them no time or resource to make school lunches a learning and sharing experience, rather a regimental process to ensure everyone is fed. When the school talked to the Parent Council about improving school dinners, their main priorities were to:



To help plan the activity, Parent Council representatives met with CEC to scope out what areas should be considered, how best to undertake the work and the most appropriate ways to present the findings.

We, like the school, feel that ensuring our children eat the best possible school meals should be a priority area and are committed to changing the food served at Towerbank. To this end we:

- Recruited an interested group of parents to help undertake research to review the school meal situation as it stands.
- Visited school for a complete 3-week menu cycle (more on this in the next section) to observe and taste the meals served and experience the lunchtime period;
- Talked to serving staff to gain insight into their role and hear their suggestions for improvements;
- Talked to pupils to gather their views on the school meals;
- Visited another primary school supplied by Edinburgh Catering, but with a cooking kitchen, to directly compare the meals, food service and culture.

We see this as the beginning of a partnership between CEC and Towerbank to make improvements to the food served in school and to maximise the opportunities that the new dining room and a larger kitchen area may present.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Our school Food Research Group, made up of parents with children from a range of years across the school, planned and carried out research throughout a three-week menu cycle.

Two parents visited the school during the entire service period, 11.30 until 1.15, to observe not only the serving and eating of food but also preparation of food and collection and disposal of waste after service had finished.

To ensure that there was a consistent approach across the three-week period, a set of standard questions, with a series of prompts, were used to guide the parent volunteers. This was reinforced with a briefing session for all the participants so that queries could be addressed and the finer details, e.g. recording of the information, could be discussed.

Our aims were to observe and understand:

- how the food arrived and was prepared for service;
- what food and drink was on offer and how it was presented;
- what meals and drinks were popular and less popular, what size of portions were offered, how the food tasted, its texture and temperature;
- what proportion of the food served was eaten and what was left over;
- the general atmosphere in the dining hall and the way in which mealtime was organised and supported.

The research period started on Monday 9th May and ran until Thursday 26th May. During that time, we spent a total of 38.5 hours observing the lunchtime process and saw over 3,000 meals being served at the school.

A dedicated set of questions was created within the SNAP survey system so that all the observations could be inputted online and then collated for this report. The photographs of the meals, the servery and the waste were uploaded and shared, again to provide a visual account of the food and the experience.

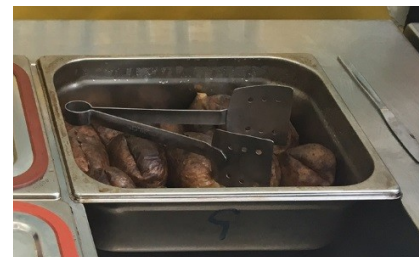
The remainder of the report details our findings based on our observations and discussions with pupils and staff, identifies key issues in relation to the food, the process and the culture and specifies a range of actions that will lead to specific improvements.

FINDINGS

On starting research, we were aware that there were issues with the school meals and had listened to anecdotal accounts from our children and from school staff. However, most parents involved reported being shocked at the quality of the food, how little the children ate and the sheer volume of waste that was generated.

Although some meals tasted fine, most looked unappealing. There were several food groups that looked attractive to the adults, but were unpopular with the children; salad and soup for example. Interestingly, the school fed back that meals had improved significantly within a day of the research beginning. This demonstrates that food can be improved in a short space of time. Given that we were experiencing 'vastly improved' food, the results of our observations are still very disappointing.

MANY OF THE MENU OPTIONS DO NOT TRAVEL WELL, MEANING APPEARANCE, TASTE AND TEXTURE SUFFER.



Burnt vegetarian meatballs in a watery sauce, chicken casserole with a texture like soup & black jacket potatoes

The biggest challenge in serving meals at Towerbank is that they are made elsewhere and brought to school. Whilst the menu that parents and children are choosing from sounds appetising, the actual dishes that are presented do not deliver on this. This was certainly true based on what we ate and observed on the days we visited school, but, and most importantly, was frequently echoed by the children we spoke to. Whilst they, or their parents, may make choices based on the menu they think they will like, the actual meals do not meet their expectations.

"pasta overcooked to the point of being mushy and blended with the sauce, which was extremely thick. Very stodgy. Texture and appearance not pleasant and burnt on the top."

Feedback from parent in research group

The menu for Edinburgh schools supplied by Edinburgh Catering is the same regardless of whether the meals are cooked on site or transported from another kitchen. It appears no allowances have been made for the transport process. This means that pasta and vegetables are overcooked, the meat in casseroles tends to have disintegrated, changing the texture of the meal and making it more like soup, and dishes that come with a sauce or a gravy tend to be watery as they have sat in steam. Potatoes that may start off crispy are soggy. On more than one occasion food has been lukewarm or too cold to eat.

"... the pasta on the other hand was disgusting. It was congealed, cold and totally horrible. Had the consistency of Pritt Stick..."

Feedback from parent in research group.

HOT FOOD SOMETIMES DOESN'T STAY HOT AND COLD FOOD DOESN'T STAY COLD.

Once the food has arrived there is a heated server for the metal containers to sit in but no facility to keep anything cool, like the jacket potato fillings, the drinks, desserts like jelly and ice cream or keep liquids like soup or custard warm. The result is that these foods, that need their temperature



soup?"



maintained, lose their consistency, e.g. the ice cream melts, the grated cheese starts to sweat and clump together and the soup is served lukewarm. Again this means that the food is very unattractive and unappetising.

"the soup was chunky veg. It could not be kept on the hot plate as no space. Looked ok but most children would prefer smooth

"[the potato] tasted ok, soft and fluffy, but was cold"

Feedback from parents in research group

"Lentil soup was like a watery version of Heinz soup. It wasn't very warm"

Feedback from parent researcher.

PRESENTATION IS POOR

In general, the food does not look appealing. The processing that takes place on site lacks imagination and is not done with children's expectations or preferences in mind. The focus appears to be on moving food in quantity, rather than preparing meals for eating.



“Rice mixed with sweetcorn and peas. Very boring looking dish! My son had five spoons full and then left to play. It actually shocked me how little he ate!”

Feedback from parent researcher

The current situation is a result of a combination of factors. The limited facilities are debilitating and constrain the activities of the dining staff. They have no connection with the food as they have not cooked or prepared it, merely unloaded it, so it appears that there is no enthusiasm to try and make it more appealing. They have little or no guidance on how to present the food and then also appear to lack the autonomy to make decisions on how it could be presented. We asked staff why, for instance, they cut fruit up but left the core, skin and pips in it, with the response, “I don’t know, we’ve always done it that way”. On the final research day, we asked the staff, on this one occasion, to keep the clementines and apples intact to see if more pupils chose it, but they said they had to cut it up.



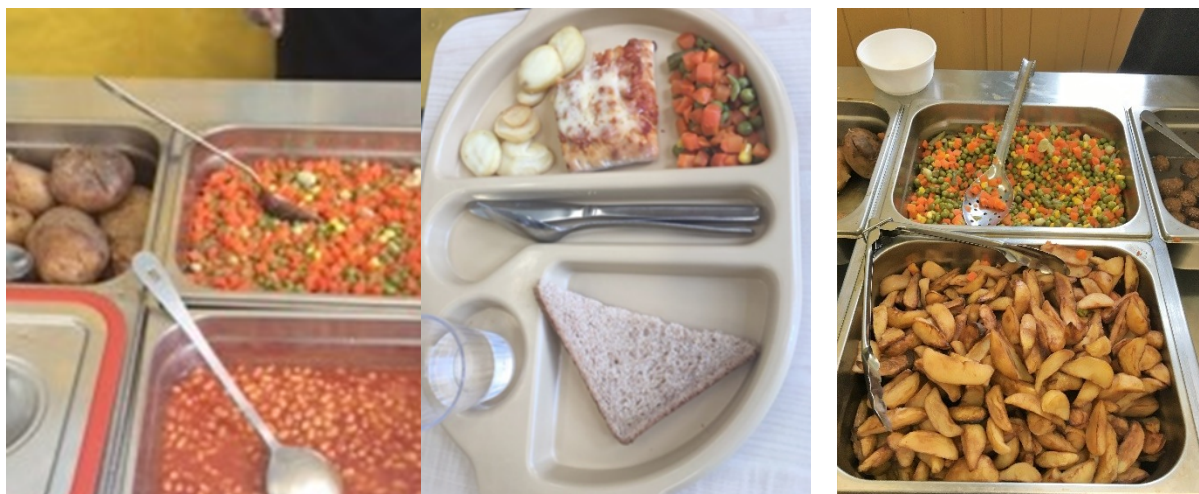
Often, children are unable to see what is available as it is in large trays or tubs above their eye level, or stacked on crowded surfaces. The display of food is not designed with them in mind. This is, in part, due to limitations in space, but mainly because the importance of the pupils' experience appears to have been overlooked.

THE PORTION SIZES DO NOT ACCOUNT FOR AGE OR APPETITE.

Our observations showed that everyone was served the same amount, regardless of their age or appetite. This was especially true of vegetables and cake. The full menu is served as standard with few exceptions and too much food was often put on the younger children's plates. This can be daunting and off-putting and the children regularly commented "that they couldn't manage it". From speaking to the serving staff, they seem to believe that it is council policy to serve a full menu of the same portion size, yet the school advises them to listen to the children and serve accordingly. There needs to be consistency of approach. Inevitably, serving too much also means that a lot of the food goes from plate to bucket, as shown in the later section.

VEGETABLES ARE UNAPPEALING

The vegetables served suffer from being cooked and then kept warm for long periods of time. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the vegetables are prepared and cooked as early as 9am (they are loaded on the van at 10.30am and not served until 12 at the earliest). The nutritional content of the food after such a period of time must be questioned.

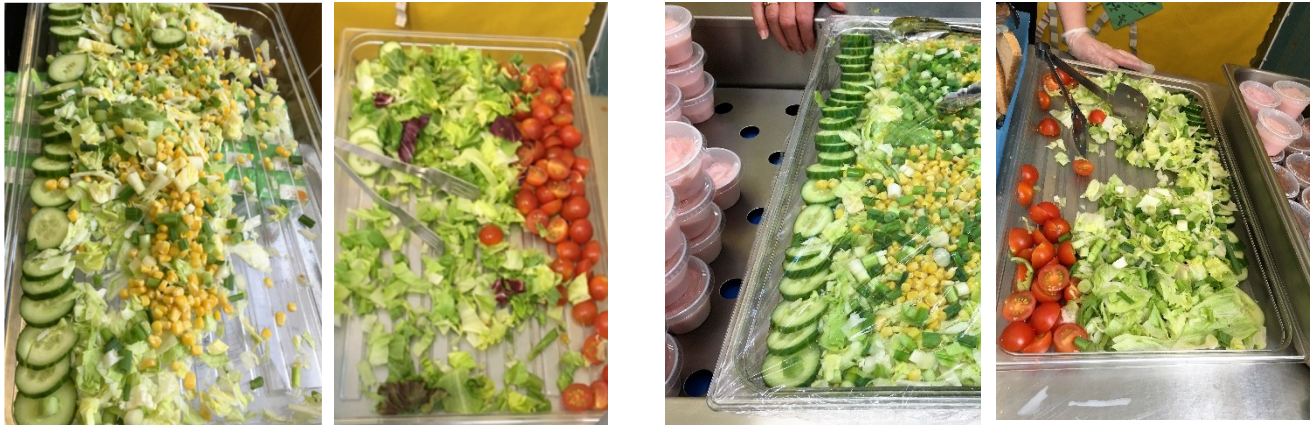


The vegetable accompaniment does not always seem to match the main dish – for instance mixed vegetables served with pizza or carrots with curry – making these unusual combinations appear like a box-ticking exercise to cover all the required food groups rather than a well-considered plate of food. Mixed vegetables (of carrots, peas, sweetcorn and runner beans) were served several times during the three weeks we ate at school. These were universally unpopular and nearly all went in the bucket. Children are often put off by mixing food – they might eat separate elements – and not many children enjoy broad or runner beans. It is important that menus are designed for children to eat and not older people.

FRUIT AND SALADS ARE NOT POPULAR BECAUSE OF THE WAY THEY ARE PRESENTED

Fruit is prepared in the same way every day: it is supplied whole, then cut into chunks with the skin and core left in. The fruit supplied is generally the same few varieties: plums, apples, pears and bananas. The fruit is then mixed in a large bowl. By the time service starts it is brown. Children do sometimes take a few portions but we rarely saw it being eaten. Fruit did not seem to be used as a part of any other dessert option (jelly or cake for example) so when a more appealing (and less healthy) dessert was offered to the children naturally they took it.

Examples of salad left at end of service, about to be thrown away and two salads ready to serve.



The salads look a lot nicer (to the adult eye) but they are not popular with the children. The bulk of the salad is made up of lettuce which, based on our observations and comments from the children and serving staff, very few children eat. The problem of not being able to see the food is particularly pertinent here as it is beyond most of the younger children's line of sight.

CHILDREN EAT ONLY PART OF THEIR MAIN MEAL AND FILL UP ON BREAD AND DRINK.

Although for most children school lunch is a hindrance to playtime and they will eat as fast as they can and then go outside, this does not mean they should not be getting a decent meal.



We observed many children eating the protein part of the meal and leaving their fruit, vegetables and carbs. This is, in part, because supervising what

every child eats (or does not eat), is impossible given the volume of children, but it is also down to the lack of appeal of the meal itself and the abundant availability of bread in large portions. Instead of having bread to supplement their main meal if they were still hungry, many children were observed taking bread as a portable snack into the playground.

On days that cake or sweet desserts were served, children were often eating these first or instead of their main course.

"Lots of the kids took extra bread. Some kids seem to eat nothing but the bread. None of them wanted the lettuce based salad". Many who take the potato eat the filling only and leave the actual potato but supplement with bread".

Feedback from parent researcher

"Many children left their main course and took a slice of bread and a piece of cake into the playground with them...most children did not take custard so they could take the cake outside".

Feedback from parent researcher

CHILDREN ARE NOT DRINKING ENOUGH

Most children chose a cup of water to accompany their meal. The supporting staff were very good at ensuring they took a drink. However, not many actually drank their water. Pupils that did and wanted a second drink were observed as being reluctant to ask for one. They have sometimes been discouraged from leaving the table mid-meal or helping themselves. This is understandable given the volume of children and the speed of turnaround in the kitchen, but nonetheless needs to be noted and addressed.

Milk is served in cartons and is far less popular. Although it is cold at the beginning of service it is not refrigerated and can be warm towards the end. A lot of children took milk and had a couple of sips before discarding an almost-full carton. Several litres of milk are poured down the sink every day.

A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF WASTE IS GENERATED EVERY DAY

"There was rarely a clean plate... some of the younger children ate nothing, maybe a piece of bread or half of the mousse."

Feedback from parent researcher

“Not one of the 80 children I observed finished their chicken curry. Most ate less than half.”

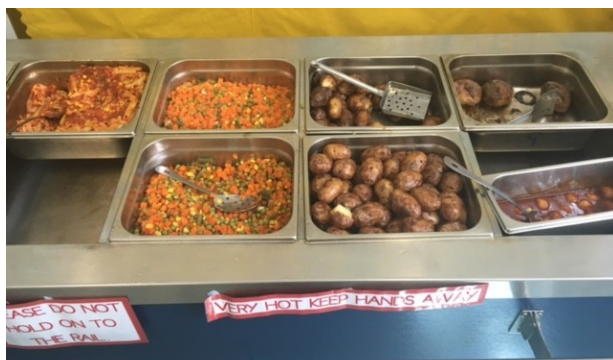
Feedback from parent researcher



Uneaten meals that were thrown away

Apart from pizza day, in which nearly all main meals were served (though not necessarily eaten), the waste was very high. Between 5 and 6 large black bags of waste (mostly food rather than packaging) are collected every day at the end of service, not including the food left in the serveries that has not been served.

Although there is a manifest with the number of meals for each option there was always a lot of food remaining. Whilst some of this could be due to pupil absence, the volume of unserved food calls into question the accuracy of the process and the extent to which the oversupply of food is being reported back to the kitchen.



Food left in the servery and bags of food waste

This food is not recycled and instead treated like general waste. It seems that too much food is always supplied (both for service and per portion), and that because of the issues of food quality, presentation, portion size and dining culture, a lot of food is not being eaten and going to waste.

In order to quantify the amount of waste and understand the cost of wasted food, on one observation day, the parents focused on carefully observing the amount of waste.

We calculated that on one day of service, where 2/3 of the food on most children's plates was uneaten, the cost was equivalent to almost £150. This is of course an approximation as accurate figures have not been provided for the unit cost of providing a school meal.

Calculation from service Monday May 16th (Chicken and gravy / vegetarian meatballs)	
Number of meals	298
Number of meals wasted if 2/3 not eaten	196
Unit cost of food (estimated)	75p
Total cost of uneaten meals	£142.00

Total cost of waste per week	£588.00
Total cost if this waste continues over 40 school weeks	£23,520.00

KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED

FOOD

A LARGE NUMBER OF THE MEALS DO NOT TRAVEL WELL SO QUALITY SUFFERS

Better Eating Better Learning states that “school food that is transported requires appropriate delivery systems and menus that specifically take account of time and temperature both of which are critical to maintain quality, nutritional quality and presentation. If food is transported it should therefore be from a managed system and with a menu specifically designed to ensure its nutritional quality and appearance.”

PRESENTATION IS POOR SO FOOD IS NOT APPETISING

We all ‘eat with our eyes’ so good presentation must be key in any dining setting. Referencing *Better Eating, Better Learning* again, “Creative, well-presented menus need to excite, challenge and nourish children and offer an appealing variety of colour, texture and taste...above all food needs to be appealing. Displays need to showcase the quality of food used and the care taken in its preparation”.

THERE IS LIMITED EQUIPMENT TO MAINTAIN THE FOOD AT THE APPROPRIATE TEMPERATURE

We have real concerns about the potential for harmful bacteria to develop in the food that sits on the counter top, especially during the warmer periods, when it should be kept in a chilled cabinet.

THE PORTION SIZES DO NOT ACCOUNT FOR AGE OR APPETITE

As referenced in *Better Eating, Better Learning*, portion sizes should be flexible, **“it is recognised that there will be a wide range of nutritional needs and appetites within a school. There is flexibility to take account of the needs of children providing appropriately sized portions and this should be reflected in the caterer’s portion management controls. Some local authorities encourage children and young people to take additional soup, fruit and vegetables to satisfy their appetite and promote the uptake of the additional bread which must be provided every day as a meal accompaniment.”**

THE TAKE UP OF FRUIT, VEGETABLES AND SALADS IS LOW.

Presentation and in some cases the preparation and selection of these food groups needs to improve because they are not presented in an appealing way, particularly for children, or are not the types of food combinations, particular vegetables, that children will eat.

CHILDREN EAT DESSERT OR BREAD INSTEAD OF THEIR MAIN MEAL.

The lack of appetising and appealing main meals is resulting in the children filling up on dry bread and / or the dessert of the day. This is clearly not a nutritious meal and means that the children become very hungry before the end of the school day.

MILK AND WATER ARE TAKEN BUT NOT DRUNK.

The water is provided in plastic glasses and kept on raised window ledge. These are handed to pupils or they can opt for a carton of milk. Most children only drink a few mouthfuls of the milk and several litres of milk are poured away every day.

A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT OF FOOD WASTE IS GENERATED EVERY DAY (5-6 LARGE BAGS).

The volume of food that is left of the children's plates is obscene and this, along with the over production of food that leads to so much unserved food results in hundreds of pounds of wasted food every day. This food is thrown into the general waste. We would expect to see a more appropriate disposal of food waste.

PROCESS

FOOD IS COOKED OFF-SITE

The biggest issue in the process is the fact that food is cooked off site and delivered in. This presents the obvious issue of food deteriorating in nutritional value, appearance and quality the longer in advance it is prepared and transported. Many of the issues identified with the food would be resolved by preparing some or all of the food on site.

SERVING STAFF SPEND MORE TIME PROCESSING THAN PREPARING

The serving staff work hard but it seems their efforts are not directed at producing appealing meals for the children to eat: instead they are

concentrating on the processing and cleaning of the insulating trays and the transfer of food to serveries.

They appear to be frustrated by their lack of involvement with food preparation (which is minimal on site) and with the lack of opportunity to influence or improve food or service. They are under pressure to have equipment and containers washed up and ready to deliver back to the cooking kitchen by the end of service. Because of the focus on turn-around times and on cleaning, there was no time to spend on finessing presentation of food or engaging fully with the children.

The school staff also play a key role every lunchtime with at least five members of staff undertaking roles like refilling the water jugs and handing out the water, checking that the cutlery, the trays and the glasses are clean, wiping down the tables in between sittings and helping to clear away the uneaten food and drink and stacking dirty trays.

FOOD IS PREPARED IN A WAY THAT IS DIFFICULT TO SERVE.

There were several instances of food being supplied that was, in practice, difficult and time consuming to serve and that caused delays to the food service. Jelly and ice-cream, for example, was delivered as a huge slab in a metal tray (jelly) that had to be sliced and scooped out, accompanied by small tubs of ice-cream that proved difficult to scoop out at the beginning of service and was completely melted by the end of it as there is no-where to keep it cold. Again greater thought needs to be given to the food that is prepared for a school with no working kitchen.

CULTURE

DINING IS PROCESS NOT EXPERIENCE DRIVEN.

As mentioned in our introduction, the school lunch service at Towerbank, necessitated by the volume of children to serve and the limited space in which to do so, is process rather than experience driven. This is exacerbated by the low quality of food, high volume of waste and the seemingly process-driven mind-set of the serving staff. We observed children spending an average of 10-15 minutes sitting and eating their lunches. Those who opt for packed lunches eat separately. This means the social aspect of eating together can sometimes be missing. This was highlighted in the Children in Scotland report prepared for *Better Eating Better Learning, Ask Children What They Want*, “The children did not like being separated from their

friends in the lunch hall, as frequently children having school dinners sat separately from those taking a packed lunch.”

STAFF ARE DISENGAGED AND LACK DIRECTION.

The serving staff were, on the whole, very open to discussion and to sharing their ideas on ways to improve school lunches. There was a great deal of frustration at having no involvement in cooking the food, or in making sensible menu choices that worked well in practical terms. It was evident that they felt they fell between CEC and school in terms of management and had no-one to offer them clear direction on how they should be working, nor anyone to feedback or offer ideas to. Because there was no engagement in the food, and no pride in what was being served (one commented she would ‘not feed this to my cat’), there was no desire to make the food look nice or to encourage children to eat it.

“Commitment and performance appear to be higher in schools where the catering staff are well trained, where they have a good understanding of the reasons behind decisions made about the food service and where they understand how they play a part in the process. Like-wise the quality of food education is likely to be better where all teachers are knowledgeable and confident around food and its impact on health and wellbeing and understand the wider context for food education, (Better Eating, Better Learning).”

TEACHING STAFF HAVE TO HELP RATHER THAN ENGAGE.

Better Eating, Better Learning outlines that “Schools in Scotland have a duty to ensure that they are health-promoting, and that they adopt a whole school approach by integrating health promotion in every aspect of school life. They are ideally placed to make a positive influence on the dietary choices and health of children and young people.” Towerbank wholeheartedly supports this philosophy but it is impossible to deliver on in the current school dinners setting. Their involvement is as practical helpers, making sure that children move through the system and have something to eat, rather than to engage with them and ask what they are enjoying, whether they have had enough and simply to chat and socialise over food.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE - LEARNING FROM ANOTHER EDINBURGH SCHOOL

We visited another primary school in Edinburgh catered for by Edinburgh Catering Services. They have a kitchen on site. The difference was remarkable, not only in terms of the food quality achieved because of cooking in school, but in terms of the atmosphere, the enjoyment and appetite of the children, the (lesser amount of) waste generated and the role of the teaching and support staff. We observed:

Thoughtful presentation that considers what children like.

The servery was colourful and well planned. Fruit was varied, cut into small portions and presented in small pots. Some fruit was left whole. Bread was cut into small triangles and arranged on a tray. It was only given if children requested it. The accompanying vegetables matched the meal choices and there was a small salad bar that was replenished regularly throughout service. The children helped themselves to manageable amounts of salad. Portion sizes were determined on the basis of individual appetite and children were allowed to go back for fruit or bread if they were still hungry after eating all of their meal.



An excellent interpretation of the menu that delivers healthy, appetising food appreciated by children and staff alike.

The main meals looked fresh and imaginatively put together. Pizza was round (a key consideration for children!), had a wholemeal base and plentiful toppings. Pasta was fresh and contained a good number of colourful vegetables. The chips were chunky, hot and fresh. Both main courses were delicious and filling. The salads, fruit and jelly were all fresh and had been kept cool. The comments from children were universally positive, “I love my school lunches”, “Izzy is the best school cook”, “Pizza is my favourite”, “I love cherry tomatoes”.



A much lighter touch involvement from teaching and support staff.

Staff were in the dining hall and made sure the children moved through the servery at an agreeable pace. They were also on hand for any queries from the children or to help them where needed. However, the children were encouraged to be independent, carrying their own trays, selecting their cutlery and drink and finding their own seat at a table. They also cleared up

after they had eaten, taking their tray to a stacked storage area and putting any waste in the bin. P7 monitors were there throughout service, wearing aprons that identified them as helpers, and performed a similar role to the teachers. One replenished water throughout service and two P7 pupils took jugs of water around the tables to top up children's drinks.

A happy, positive serving team who are proud of the food they deliver and eager to share best practice.

The serving staff were keen to tell us about the way they worked. They had a very clear idea about what children liked and disliked and how to present food to them. They understood that simple things like cutting fruit and providing it in pots, and making pizzas round and thin were important to a child. The dining hall was definitely their area, for which they took responsibility and ownership. Both the cook and two of the serving staff came out to talk to the children at some point during service, even though it was a busy lunch (280 covers that day). We observed effective dialogue and communication between the serving team and with the supervising teaching staff. The cook was involved and interested in how much was eaten and what the children thought of the food. She explained that when the salad bar was first introduced children tended to take a large amount, half of which ended up being thrown away. When this was noted she spent some time with the children coaching them on what amount to take. This has evidently had an impact as all the salad was eaten.

Clean plates - lots of them - and minimal food waste

The difference in food waste between this school and Towerbank was astounding. There were one and a half bags full at the end of service and the majority of this was the disposable plastic cups used for water. Any food that hadn't been served was either saved for the following day (fruit and the potato fillings that had been kept cool), served as staff lunches (pasta and a couple of slices of pizza) or given to the school compost team (some pasta). There were no vegetables left and because the salad bar contained only a small amount that was replenished throughout service there was very little left.

Good practice - whether on site or off

Many of these examples of good practice observed at another Edinburgh primary school could easily be implemented at Towerbank at no extra cost. We see no reason why most of them cannot be actioned immediately.



ACTIONS REQUIRED FOR

IMPROVEMENT

We would like to see changes that lead to immediate improvements. We believe it is the duty of the council to ensure that our children are provided with meals of equal quality to those in other schools in Edinburgh.

MENU

- review and adapt the menu to take full account of what food travels well and what doesn't and then how it is stored and served with the facilities available in the school so that appropriate food temperatures are maintained.
- involve the school, including parent groups and the children, in preparing menus. Research referenced in *Better Eating, Better Learning* captures this perfectly, "The Children in Scotland research also shows that children and young people want to input into improvements to school food. Involving children and young people in the early stages of menu development will raise their awareness of the challenges, values and constraints in which school food operates and help instil a sense of ownership for the final menu produced."

FRUIT

- increase the variety of fruits provided (include melon, strawberries, blueberries and grapes).
- present it in small portions, cut, cored and, where appropriate, peeled.
- make sure it isn't brown by using apple or orange juice to make sure it retains its natural colour.
- combine it with other dessert foods e.g. fruity jelly, banana custard, fruit crumbles.
- leave some pieces whole so children can take it into the playground to eat.

VEGETABLES

- match vegetables to the meal being served rather than provide any available vegetables to accompany a meal.
- do not serve mixed vegetables but offer one or two different vegetables, served separately. Take broad beans and runner beans off the menu as these are universally unpopular.
- try offering raw vegetables as an alternative to cooked ones.
- do not serve lettuce or onion in a mixed salad.
- offer a small salad bar featuring the most popular salad vegetables i.e. cherry tomatoes, cucumber and peppers. Offer raisins, croutons and other appropriate accompaniments as the menu changes.

PORTION SIZES / BREAD

- reduce the amount of vegetables served: stick to a small portion that children can manage.
- have a consistent policy, communicated to the serving staff, on what they should be serving the children: a full menu or only what the children ask for.
- halve the portion sizes of the cakes served, at least for the earlier years.
- offer bread only when the main meal and dessert has been eaten, and reduce the portion size (quarter slices not hunks of bread).

DRINKS

- take milk off the menu or offer in cups from a jug rather than in cartons. This is contingent on having a fridge or chilled cabinet on site, which we think is essential.
- have a water station / fountain at the children's level so they can replenish water if they need more.

SERVING STAFF

- involve the staff on site in menu selection and development so they can advise on what is practical and take ownership for some of the decisions made. The staff have valuable insight and experience which, if made use of, could make their input far more positive.
- review the activities that the serving staff currently have to undertake (For example, do they need to clean out the insulating trays when they are then cleaned again at the high school?) so that the value of their input on the dining experience can be maximised and so that the school staff can be relieved of some of the duties that would normally fall within the remit of the catering staff.
- have a training / ideas day involving the serving staff, school staff and children to talk through how the food should be presented and served. The Parent Council would be happy to facilitate this.
- introduce the serving staff to the children and give them name badges.

- have a school dinners notice board with photos of the serving staff and information about them and the job they do. Make them a part of the school team. Give them somewhere they can change and store their belongings that is not in the kitchen area.
- implement regular visits from the cook who produces the food. She should be able to monitor how the food travels, how it is presented at service and, most importantly, is received by the children
- in the long term, ensure that serving staff have access to training opportunities that help them appreciate the important role good school food and service has to play in a child's education.

EQUIPMENT

The changes to the dining room and the kitchen present a real opportunity to tackle some of the challenges currently faced, however we have been made aware that the washing facilities will move into the new kitchen area along with the serveries. It is disappointing that little consideration has been given to the noise levels and actual experience of the trays and serving equipment being washed as a child tries to receive their food. The current kitchen has appropriate washing facilities and we would urge further consideration of retaining that room for that purpose and equipping the kitchen so that some food preparation/cooking can be undertaken as this will enhance the quality of the food provided and the dining experience.

This would not only improve the nutritional value of the food, improve its quality and appearance and make it more appealing, it would also allow serving staff to take some ownership for the food offered and give them scope to make suggestions. We think that:

- as the current plastic beige trays reach the end of their lifecycle (as many now have) they should be replaced with brightly coloured trays that are more appealing to eat from and which will not be as distressed as some of the current batch.
- there should be a fridge on site to store milk, yoghurts and fillings for baked potatoes.
- there should be a chilled cabinet in the servery to store and display items that need to be kept cool throughout service, such as jelly, mousse, cheese and coleslaw.
- if appropriate refrigeration facilities are not provided, remove from the menu those foods that need to be chilled and as a matter of urgency check the environmental health implications of storing food that should be chilled at ambient temperatures.

- there should be a heated cauldron on the servery to keep soup or custard warm throughout service.
- a multi-purpose convection oven should be installed in the new kitchen area to allow some items to be prepared and cooked on site, such as baked potatoes, vegetables, and home baking. This could double as a resource for the school to teach cooking skills and introduce children to new foods.

THE DINING EXPERIENCE

Once the anticipated improvements in terms of food and service are delivered for Towerbank pupils, we will be able to work on the food culture and dining experience at the school. As it is, the staff have to focus on the process. We'd like to move beyond that. If the serving team have more ownership and accountability, and a greater connection with the food and the children, this should leave the teachers and senior management team with more opportunities to broaden the scope of what they do in the dining room. Our hope is that acting on the changes outlined in this report will enable the school to explore:

- encouraging teaching staff to eat with the children now and again.
- inviting families into school to eat with their children, for example on open days, as part of P1 induction and on an ad hoc basis to monitor how the food is being received and enjoyed
- form pupil groups (as part of the health and wellbeing curriculum) that look at food and its influence on behaviour, learning and growing.
- introduce cooking clubs, tasting sessions and using the space and servery with some cooking equipment as a base for educational opportunities.

The Parent Council became involved in reviewing the school meals at Towerbank at the request of the school who want to improve the quality of the food served, reduce the amount of waste generated each day and make lunchtime into a pleasant dining experience. The school staff, parents and pupils are committed to effecting change, as much as possible, but, in the absence of a working kitchen, the ability to make the required changes fall within the remit and control of CEC.

Schools have a duty to ensure that they are health promoting and a key way to do that is to serve exemplary food and drink that positively influences the dietary choices of the children. Towerbank Primary school currently cannot meet this obligation. We have provided a robust evidence base of the current situation with the school meal provision and we ask CEC to help ensure that the pupils at Towerbank benefit from the same quality of school meals and dining experiences as the pupils in other primary schools across the city.

APPENDIX 1 - AREAS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. **Are kitchens asked to follow recipes for each menu item or are these open to interpretation?**

We consulted with a dietician at the NHS who outlined their policy of supplying recipes to different suppliers to ensure that meal and nutritional consistency was achieved regardless of who cooked the food. Does this happen across CEC and if not how do you ensure that the menu is nutritionally consistent in every school?

2. **Are we compliant with environmental health rules by not keeping chilled food at the appropriate temperature?**

Environmental health officers have indicated and some actually insist that all food should be kept refrigerated regardless of how long it is left out. We think this depends on the EHO but we would like to consult on the situation at Towerbank. We believe it is good practice for all food to be kept within 0-5c if it is supposed to be chilled or hot held over 63c for a maximum of 4hrs. On speaking to a catering manager we were advised that EHO will always insist on keeping ready to eat food in a refrigerated device. (Ready to eat food is a high risk food as it is any food which has no cooking to kill any harmful bacteria i.e. sandwiches or cooked meats, etc.)

3. **Food and drink offered in schools should be a model of healthy eating.**

Education about food should support children and young people to make the right choices to drive changes in their diets. The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act restricts the amount of salt, sugar and fat content permitted in school meals and sets out foods that are able to be included in school meals and those which are not. We know that the meals produced as part of Edinburgh Catering Service's school meals service have been analysed to ensure they fully meet the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 however we ask that the meals at Towerbank are analysed at the point of being served to ensure that they comply with the Act.

4. **Impact on PE provision**

When food is delivered into Towerbank no children are allowed in the playground for health and safety reasons. This means that, should inside space be unavailable, children are unable to exercise outside during the possible delivery window. Can a better work-around be found that does not restrict a significant part of the school's usable space?

5. **Planning of dining room space**

What involvement have pupils and parents had in the scoping out exercises performed to determine the purpose, function and, ultimately, layout of the new serving, kitchen and dining space?

6. **School meals provider**

What are the criteria for reviewing the provider of school meals and how can we

be involved in reviewing the best value option for the school and children? Is there a School Food and Nutritional Action Group and if so is there representation from a school with no working kitchen?