

# Better Health Staffordshire: school food survey

Kate Sutcliffe and Rochelle Edwards  
Staffordshire County Council

# Better Health Staffordshire

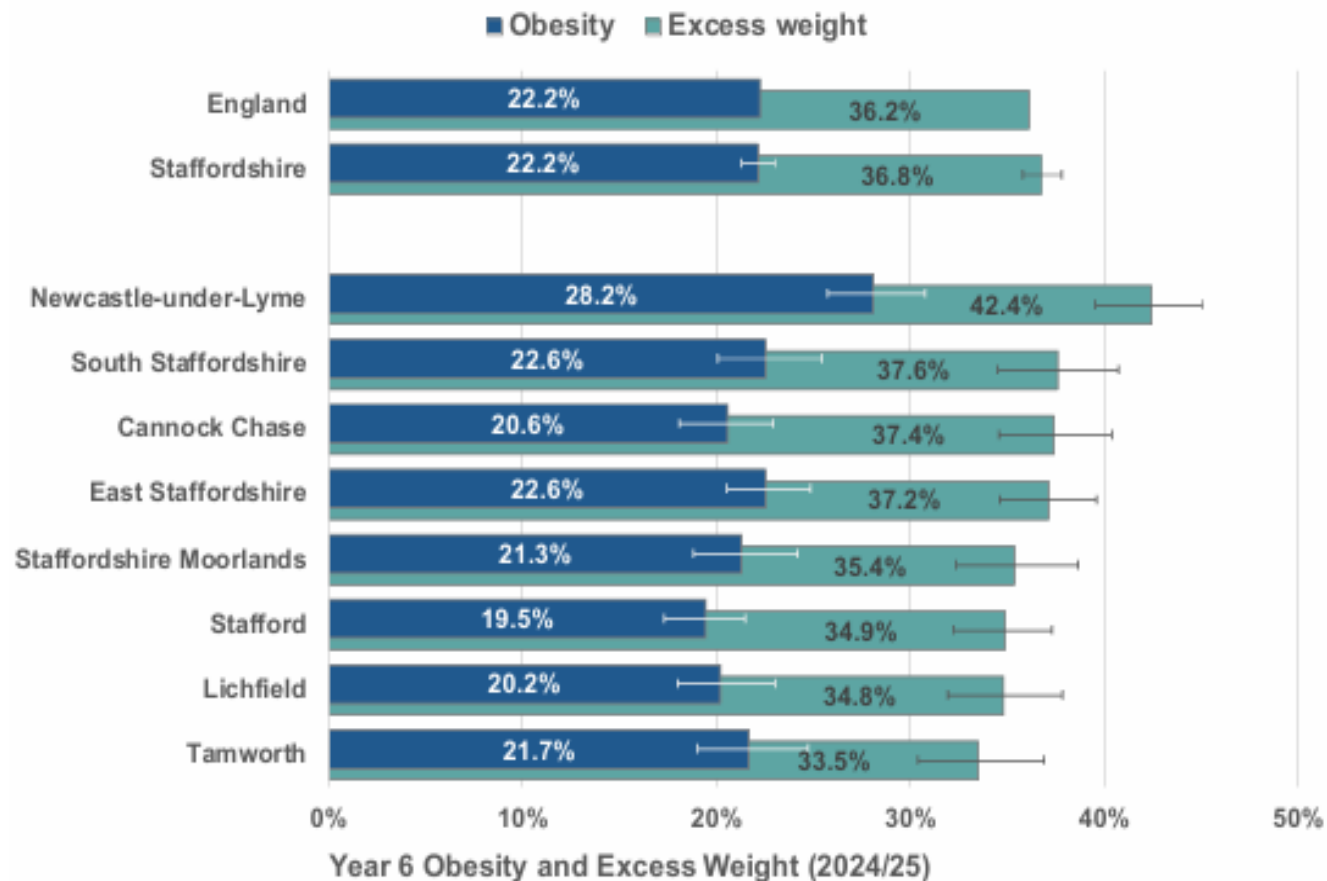
## Mission

- Tackle the causes of excess weight, physical inactivity, and poor diet.
- Enable and empower individuals, families, and communities to move more, eat a healthy balanced diet, and maintain a healthy weight.

# The scale of the challenge

## National Child Measurement Programme 2024/25

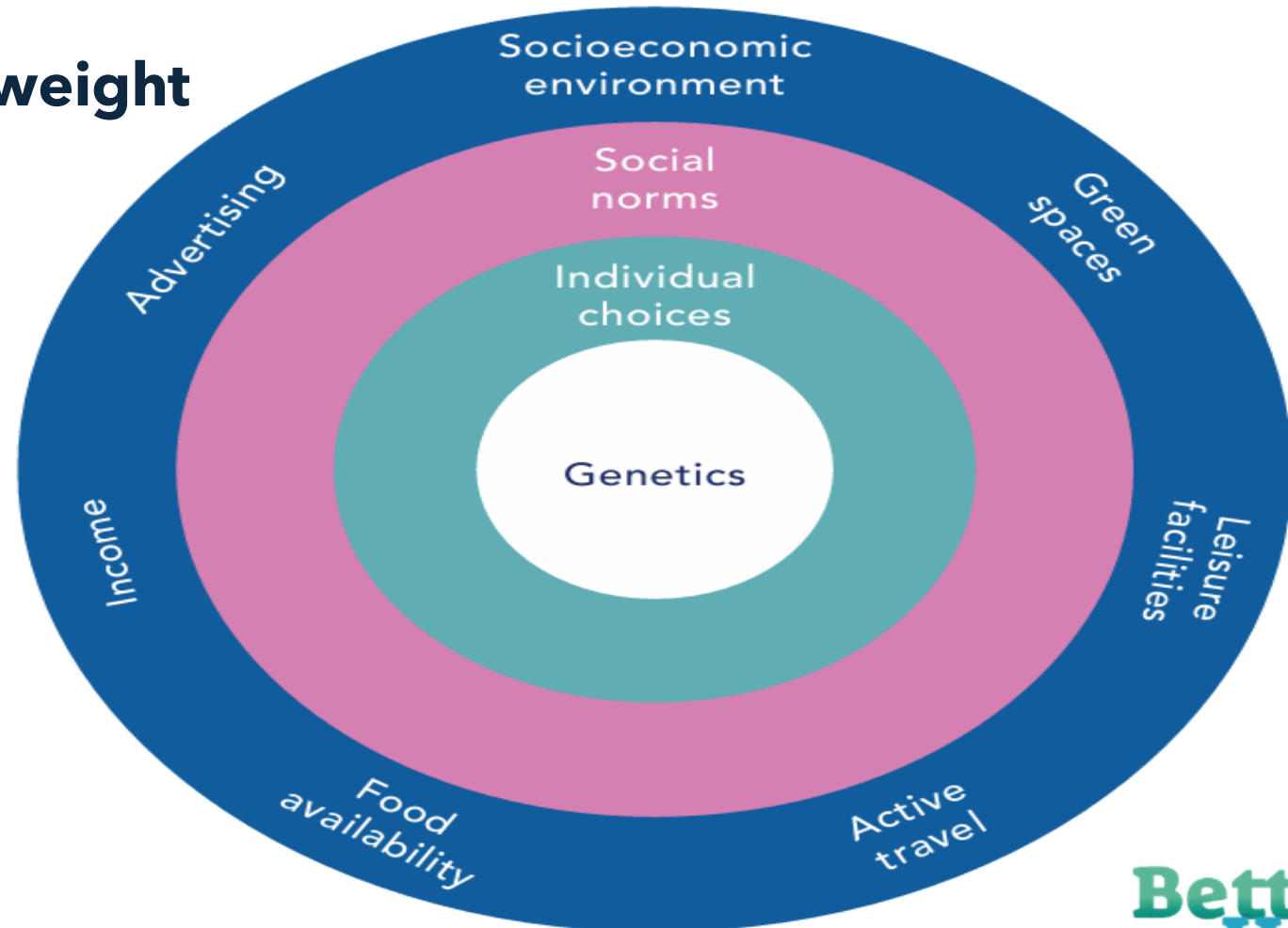
- One in 4 Staffordshire children live with excess weight at reception age (higher than national).
- More than one in ten Staffordshire children live with obesity at reception age (similar to national).
- More than one in three Staffordshire children live with excess weight by year 6 (similar to national).
- One in four Staffordshire children live with obesity by year 6 (similar to national).



# Why is it so complex?

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## Factors influencing excess weight

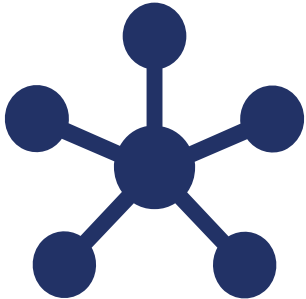


Source: Director of Public Health Annual Report 2026 Summary: Healthy weight in childhood [Director of Public Health annual report 2026.pdf](#)

# Staffordshire's whole system approach



Data, insight  
and  
evidence



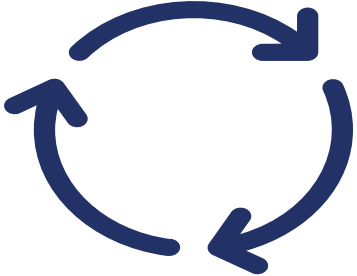
Partnerships  
and  
communities



Healthy settings  
and  
environments



Information,  
advice and  
guidance



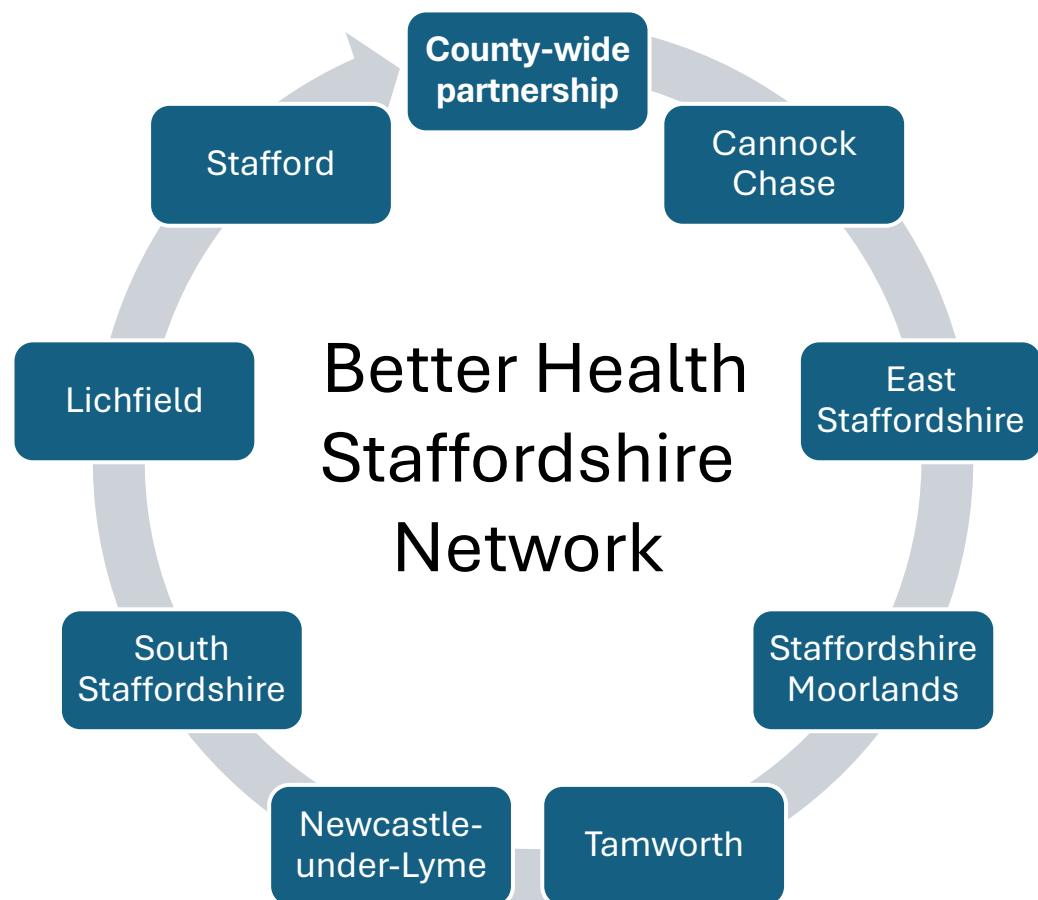
Measure impact  
and embed  
learning



# Implementing a whole system approach

[www.staffordshire.gov.uk](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk)

## Partnerships and communities



## Information, advice and guidance

The **Fun Food Factory** ran interactive workshops to year 6 children in Tamworth schools to raise awareness of healthy eating. The feedback was very positive with 90% of children reporting that it made them want to have a go at cooking healthy foods.

*"I have learnt that it is not hard to make sure you have a balanced diet, so that you can be healthy".*

*"I learnt the food groups I never knew about".*

*"We can make food with vegetables, and it tastes good"*

*"To be healthy and look after your body with what you eat"*

*"I learnt that every green is nice in some way"*

# Implementing a whole system approach

## Data, insight, and evidence

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council's Move More team, surveyed 10 secondary schools to better understand children's relationship with physical activity.

**72%** of participants said they understand the importance of an active lifestyle with a further 23% saying that they have 'somewhat' of an understanding.

**1 in 3** stated that the main reason for not taking part in activity is 'lack of time'.

**Half** of participants were walking to and from school every day.

**40%** of participants were walking as their main activity at lunchtime, rather than sitting, playing games or playing sport

**2 out of 3** believe that curriculum PE and school sport helps them to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

### Staffordshire school food survey



# School Food Survey: Introduction

To incorporate education settings into the Better Health Staffordshire approach we:

- **Designed a survey** (by a small working group) to gather views and opinions from staff on what works well and the challenges in school food systems
- **Launched the survey** in March 2025 and closed it in May 2025
- **Distributed the survey** via School Ebag (Staffordshire County Council communication system)
- **Promoted widely** through key partners and networks

# Survey Response Overview

**Total number of schools countywide: 409**

**Survey responses received: 97**

## **School Types Represented:**

- 30 x Local Authority maintained schools
- 54 x Academies
- 2 x Pupil Referral Unit
- 3 x Faith School
- 2 x Further Education College
- 6 x Special School

## **Setting Age Range:**

- 73 x Primary / Nursery / First School
- 6 x Middle
- 16 x Secondary / High School / Post 16
- 2 x Post 16

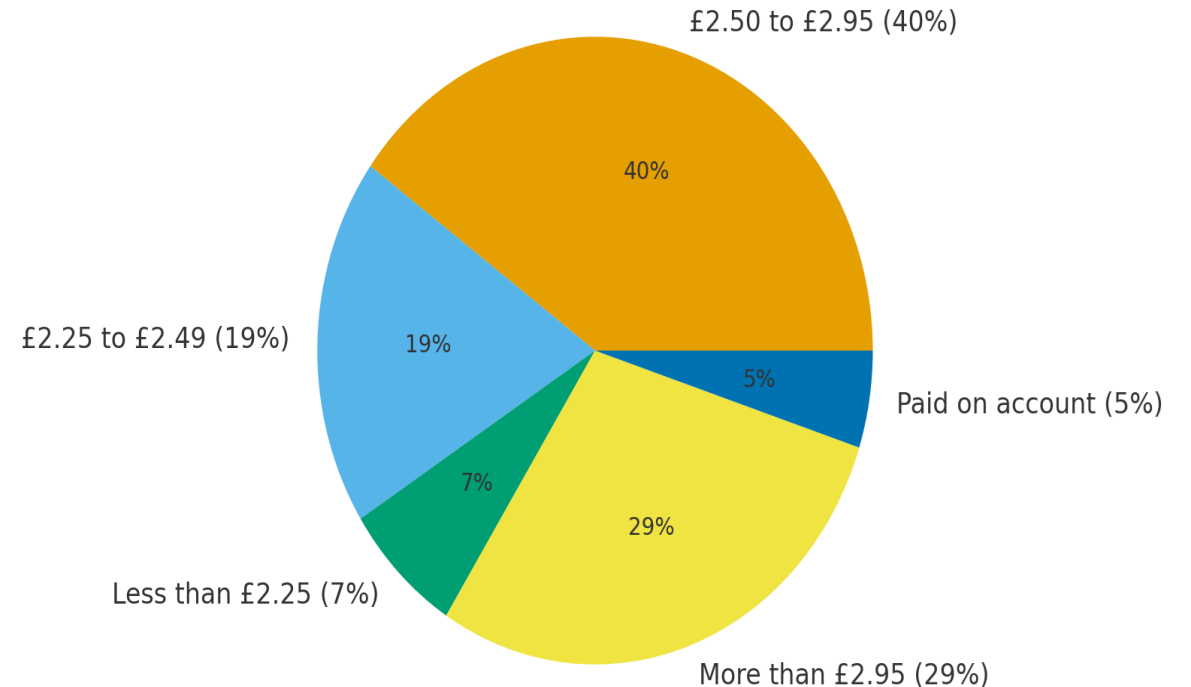
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## Uptake of school meals

- 45% of responses indicate that between **50% to 74%** of students choose school meals weekly, the highest number of responses
- 29% reported **25% to 49%** uptake
- 16% reported **75% to 90%** uptake
- 6% reported over **90%** uptake
- 4% reported **25% or below** uptake

## Prices charged for school meals



# School Catering

## Who provides your school meals?

- 71 schools use external catering providers
- 25 schools employ their own catering staff
- 1 school has food brought in from another school

## How would you rate the menu provided by your caterer?

- Fairly good and very good together account for 71% of responses
- Neither good nor poor makes up 22%
- Poor and very poor combined are only 7%, indicating few complaints

## Do you offer meal tasting sessions?

- 48% of settings currently offer **meal tasting** sessions, and a further 13% are interested in introducing them

## Which catering provider do you use?

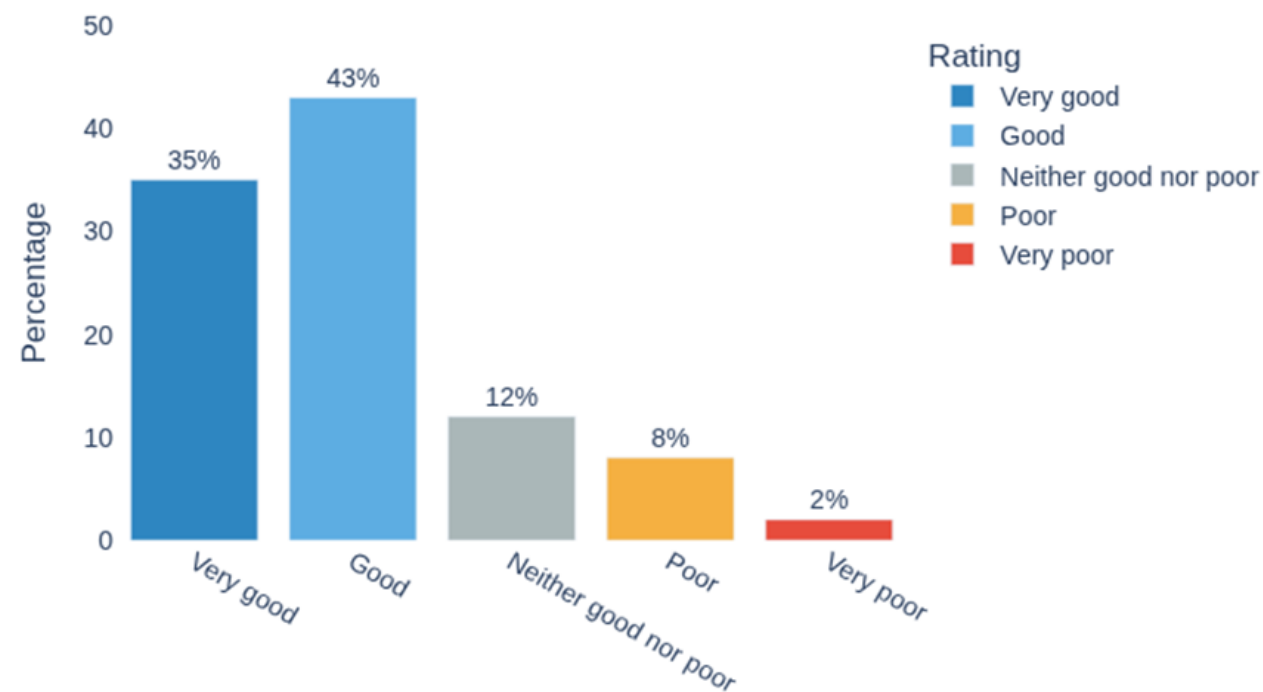
Catering Provider	Number of settings
Edwards and Ward	26
MiQuill	11
Mellors	8
Chartwells	4
Aspens	4
Alliance in Partnership	4
Dolce	3
City Catering	3
Caterlink	3
ABM	2
Educaterers	1
Unsure	1
Jeffery's Cafe	1
Midshires	1

**Edwards and Ward** is the most used catering provider, followed by **MiQuill** and then **Mellors**.

## How would you rate the quality of the food provided by your caterer?

- Most respondents rate the quality of food positively, with **31%** saying **very good** and **41%** saying **good**
- **22%** of respondents felt the quality of the food was **neither positive nor negative**
- A smaller number reported the quality of food negatively with **poor/very poor quality at 6%**

## How would you rate the presentation of the food provided by your caterer?



# Fruit and Vegetables

## **Is fruit widely available at lunchtime for all students if they would like it?**

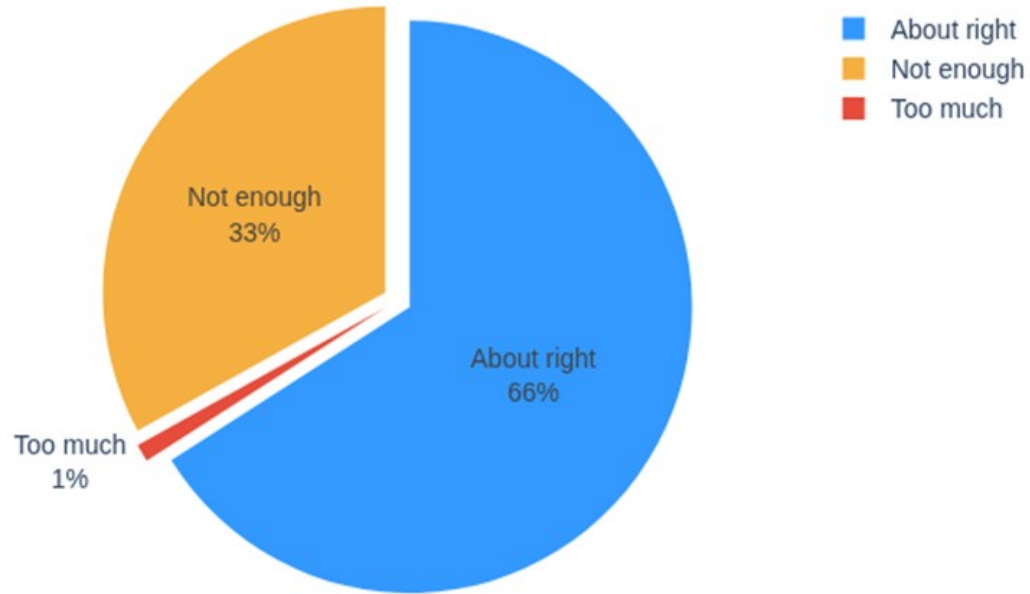
- 68% reported that fruit is consistently available at lunchtime
- 32% indicated that fruit is not always accessible, either saying "No", "Sometimes" or "Don't know"

## **Are vegetables/salad widely available at lunchtime for all students if they would like them?**

- 85% of respondents reported that vegetables are consistently available at lunchtime
- 15% indicated that availability is either inconsistent or lacking.

# Meal Portions

How would you rate the meal portion size (per student) provided by your caterer?



## Are students able to have second servings?

- 50% of respondents indicated that second servings **are not available**
- 34% said seconds were available **if there is excess food**
- A smaller portion noted that students can have seconds **if they ask** (9%), or that second servings are **routinely offered** (7%)

# Food Waste

**27%** of respondents identified food waste as an issue in their school.

# Eating Areas and Times

[www.staffordshire.gov.uk](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk)

- The **dining hall** is the primary location for lunch, mentioned in **95%** of responses
- **81%** of respondents said **alternative eating spaces** were available for students who found the dining hall overstimulating
- **80%** of respondents said that **students eat in the same room** whether having a packed lunch or school meal
- **76%** of respondents reported that **mealtimes are staggered** for different year groups

# What other factors do you think influence school/college mealtimes?

Quality of the offer and where it is eaten

Social skills

Neurodiversity

Extra-curricular activities

Time available to eat

Food avoidance

cost

Friendships

Length of queue

Disordered eating/eating behaviours

# School Food Standards

## How familiar are you with the School Food Standards?

- 51% of respondents are **fairly familiar** with the School Food Standards, with fewer reporting very familiar (33%) or no familiarity (16%)

## How easy is it to comply with the School Food Standards in your school?

- Most schools find it easy to comply with the School Food Standards, though 7% reported difficulties



# Have your say! National school food standards consultation

School Food Standards: updating the legislative framework - Introduction - Department for Education - Citizen Space

## Rationale:

- Diets are too high in sugar and low in fibre
- Rising childhood obesity and tooth decay
- Standards do not reflect current nutritional guidance
- Inconsistency across schools

## Timeframe:

- Consultation deadline: **Friday 12th June 2026.**
- Final policy decisions : Autumn 2026.
- Implementation: September 2027 (primary schools).

# Free School Meals

## Do you think that there are a number of parents/carers who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) but do not claim them?

- 65% of respondents believe there are parents/carers not claiming FSM
- 23% believe this is not an issue
- 12% are unsure, indicating some uncertainty or lack of awareness

## What would it take to increase the uptake of Free School Meals in your setting?

Key themes:

### Parental Engagement

- Regular contact with parents, support with paperwork, and education about FSM benefits were frequent responses. Some parents are unaware or reluctant, especially in primary schools

### Application Process

- Simplifying the process, offering help to complete forms, and improving accessibility (e.g. QR codes, automatic checks)
- Reluctance to share personal details and difficulty accessing online forms

### Menu Quality

- Many responses highlighted the need for more appealing, varied menus
- Fussy eaters and lack of cold meal options were common concerns.

# Cookery Lessons and Gardening

## Do you provide cookery lessons for students?

- 66% of schools provide cookery lessons
- 89% of the schools providing cookery lessons do so as part of the curriculum, and most are held weekly or termly
- Some schools also use cookery for enrichment or pastoral support, and a few offer it less regularly or for special occasions

## Do you offer any gardening / growing food / forest school provision?

- 68% of schools already offer gardening, growing food, or forest school activities
- 19% of schools do not provide any
- 13% of schools are interested but do not currently offer these activities.

# Key Learnings from the Survey

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- Opportunity to learn from schools with high **School Meal Uptake** and those that employ their own catering staff
- Learning from schools that promote **Free School Meals** and offer support to eligible families
- A desire for schools to understand the **School Food Standards** easily
- Just under half of respondents report **fruit and vegetables** are not consistently available at lunchtime, improving availability will help ensure all students have consistent access to healthy options
- A number of schools find **Food Waste** an issue that varies in severity across districts
- A gap has been identified in schools that do not provide **cookery lessons** as part of the curriculum or enrichment activities
- There is a desire from some schools to set up **gardening**, growing food, or forest school activities
- A small number of schools do not have provision for children or young people to access alternative **eating spaces**
- The 3 most **common challenges** identified around healthy meal provision are:
  - Cost and financial pressure
  - Portion size and quality
  - Student's preferences and habits

# Next steps

## **Children and young people survey:**

- Microsoft forms survey launching May 2026
- Aimed at years 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12 including College students
- Younger children will be asked for responses via the class teacher e.g. PSHE lesson time
- Children and young people able to complete the survey independently will be asked to complete the survey via an email link
- Promoted via Headteachers, PSHE coordinators, PSHE newsletters, student champions, school councils, education colleagues

## **Parents & Carers survey:**

- Microsoft forms survey link launching May 2026
- Promoted via school newsletters (where possible), PTFAs, SCC communications, Family Hub social media channels,

# Questions?

[www.staffordshire.gov.uk](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk)

Any questions, thoughts or ideas?

## Contact details:

### Staffordshire School Food Survey

Kate Sutcliffe

Commissioning Officer, Public Health

[Kate.sutcliffe@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Kate.sutcliffe@staffordshire.gov.uk)

### Better Health Staffordshire

Rochelle Edwards

Commissioning Manager, Public health

[Rochelle.edwards@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Rochelle.edwards@staffordshire.gov.uk)

