



The Food for Life Partnership Programme: an evaluation

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The Food for Life Partnership (FFLP)'s aim is to transform school food to encourage healthy eating and improve food awareness among children and young people. In July 2010, NFER undertook an evaluation of the FFLP programme which brings together four food-focused charities - The Soil Association, Focus on Food Campaign, Health Education Trust and Garden Organic. The programme encourages schools to serve fresh, seasonal and ethically sourced food and to deliver a programme of activities, such as food growing and cooking, to educate young people about nutrition and food provenance.

We found that FFLP has successfully enrolled over 3600 schools who each received a range of materials to promote practical food education. Each school is also encouraged to progress through a series of bronze, silver and gold level awards. Schools demonstrating an advanced level of awareness and commitment to food culture and education had been recruited as 'Flagship' schools and received additional support and funding to fast-track them towards the Gold award. For example, Flagship schools receive support from an FFLP advisor, are given cookery lessons on the 'cooking bus', take part in a gardening workshop with Garden Organic, send their school cook on a specialist course delivered by Jeanette Orrey, School Meals Policy Advisor to the Soil Association, and gain a link with a working farm. In return for this support, which was extremely well received, Flagship schools are expected to act as role models for other schools enrolled on the programme and disseminate their knowledge and experiences.

Our qualitative study found that the FFLP had been, to a large extent, effective

in meeting its overarching aim of enabling schools to transform their food culture and provide positive outcomes for children, families and communities. The FFLP provided focus and momentum and helped build and embed a sustainable whole-school approach to health-related activity within all the schools visited. One head-teacher in a Flagship school commented,

'It's hard work, you have really got to be committed, you couldn't do it half-heartedly. But by getting everybody 'on board' it became easier. It is now something we don't think about, it is something we just do. It is just so much of what we are.'

Interviewees reported that:

- making meal times more attractive by improving the food and the dining environment led to increased numbers of children taking school meals and improved social cohesion within schools
- there was raised awareness of food sourcing, production and healthy eating and evidence that the changes in food provision had resulted in pupils trying new foods and in some cases selecting more healthy options
- the experiential learning resulting from FFLP activity was considered effective in helping to engage or re-engage pupils with learning issues and challenges.
- a knock-on effect was a perceived improvement in pupil attainment and behaviour.

Interestingly, the non-Flagship schools we visited had managed to make as much progress as the Flagship schools due to their own enthusiasm and the links and



advice provided by the FFLP. In addition, the most successful schools had embedded the programme into the curriculum, thereby reducing the impact of two of the main challenges of the programme, time commitment and sustainable funding. However the implementation of the FFLP was not without its challenges; although the majority of the schools viewed the FFLP as sufficiently flexible to allow them to implement it in a variety of ways, some had found the award-related criteria daunting and unrealistic. This was particularly relevant in respect to the cost, availability and sourcing of both local and organic produce. Schools also reported that it is essential to have someone driving the programme forward in each school and that buy-in and support from the leadership team and other staff was also vital.

Further information

The full report can be found at www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/BIN01/



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