



**be healthy**  
research and  
services from  
NFER





## Healthy eating

NFER's health education team has conducted a number of important studies in recent years, evaluating health education programmes and pilot schemes. This brochure details the work being done by NFER in this important and developing area, and what our team can do for you.

NFER's team has evaluated a range of innovative and often high-profile health projects and programmes.

## PhunkyFoods

We are evaluating the PhunkyFoods programme. Launched in 2005 by Purely Nutrition Ltd, this initiative supports about 300 schools in teaching primary children about healthy eating and physical activity. The programme is delivered through art, drama, music, play and practical experience with food. Due for completion in autumn 2008, the evaluation covers:

Research  
under way  
now

- benefits, limitations and challenges of the different aspects of PhunkyFoods
- whether the programme is value for money
- changes in pupil performance and motivation
- changes in children's diet and level of physical activity
- changes in children's understanding of healthy eating and exercise
- what children like and dislike about the programme.

*One of the priorities of the Every Child Matters policy is young people's physical, mental, emotional and sexual health. Schools prepare children for a healthy adulthood through personal, social and health education and inform them of the potential dangers of smoking, drinking alcohol and drug use, and the importance of making healthy choices.*

## School fruit and vegetable scheme

Our team conducted a series of research projects relating to the national School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme. The initiative, part of the Government's 5-a-day programme, provides a free piece of fruit or a vegetable to children aged four to six years, every school day. NFER was involved in evaluating area pilot projects to identify practical issues associated with the implementation of the scheme. In partnership with nutritionists from the University of Leeds, NFER then evaluated the impact of the regional roll-out on schools and pupils, monitoring changes in consumption, nutrient intake and attitudes to healthy eating. A further study explored the longer-term impact of the scheme.

**Key finding:** Children in years 1, 2 and 3 were eating more fruit and vegetables, with consumption rising from 3.65 portions in 2004 to 4.41 in 2006. However, fruit consumption declined as children got older.

The team's groundwork in evaluating the area pilot schemes gave policy makers valuable information about how to deliver the scheme. Evaluation of the regional roll-out told policy makers how the scheme was received and what its impact was on pupils and schools. The last stage of evaluation supplied information about longer-term impact.

*NFER's team has also researched other aspects of health education, including sexual education and mental health issues. Information about these projects is available on the website at [www.nfer.ac.uk/research-areas/health-education](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research-areas/health-education).*

### **'Smart' lunchboxes**

Around 45 per cent of pupils take a packed lunch to school, but how healthy are these lunches? In partnership with researchers at the University of Leeds, NFER's team worked with parents and schools to evaluate an intervention designed to improve the contents of children's packed lunches. The research was based on a randomised control trial, involving 1,300 children aged eight to nine in 89 schools across the country. Case-study visits to 12 schools enabled the research team to explore the findings in more depth.

**Key finding:** The intervention pack had provided practical assistance and guidance in encouraging healthy eating and this reinforced the healthy eating messages that schools were promoting.

### **School breakfasts**

A study into School Breakfasts in Wales, part of an initiative of the Welsh Assembly, looked at the impact of providing pupils with breakfast before the start of lessons. It examined awareness of food and nutrition, the effects on discipline and behaviour and educational attainment, as well as the role of local authorities, funding and staff recruitment and retention.

**Key findings:** School breakfasts made children feel settled in school and developed their social skills. They also led to better behaviour and concentration, and improved relationships between children and staff.



## School meals

The School Meals and Other Nutritional Issues in Wales study was commissioned by the Welsh Local Government Association to examine attitudes to school meals and nutrition among local authorities and schools. Carried out by NFER's Welsh Unit, the study looked at what was being offered in schools during lunch and other times, and the challenges associated with trying to promote healthy eating.

**Key findings:** Take-up of healthy food was affected by quality, choice and home influences. Local authorities used varying criteria for purchasing food and reported difficulties making school meals services cost-effective. Greatest satisfaction with the service was in schools where food was cooked on site.

## Smoking, drinking and drug use

The campaign to reduce the proportion of young people who smoke, drink and use illegal drugs has involved a long-term study by NFER (in partnership with the National Centre for Social Research) looking at the number of 11 to 15-year-olds who indulge in one of more of these activities. The annual survey began in 1982 and is currently gathering data from approximately 10,000 young people in more than 300 schools in England using questionnaires. The results of the 2007 survey are due to be reported in 2008.

**Key findings:** Last figures, for 2006, showed that alcohol consumption was the most prevalent of the three, at 55% of young people having tried it at least once, followed by smoking at 39% and drugs at 24%.



## Healthy schools

NFER evaluated the impact of the National Healthy School Standard (NHSS) in conjunction with the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the Institute of Education. The NHSS had three main aims: to contribute to reducing health inequalities, to promote social inclusion and to raise pupil achievement. Schools were encouraged to adopt whole-school approaches to developing a range of health and education-related themes. Our team carried out an in-depth evaluation of the implementation of NHSS activities, and analysed several existing databases in order to find out the extent to which the Standard was achieving its aims.

**Key findings:** Schools valued their involvement in NHSS and believed the status of health-related work had improved. Analysis of Ofsted data confirmed that NHSS schools were ahead of others on several relevant criteria. However, evidence of impact on individual pupil outcomes was hard to find. More active participation of children and young people was considered essential to the Standard's continuing and future success.

## How we can help you

NFER's team can help you find out how successfully your local authority, school or other organisation is handling issues to do with health education. Our range of expertise and experience allows us to offer independent, innovative and rigorous research and evaluation services to clients, underpinned by a national and international reputation for excellence that is second to none. Our researchers adhere to a code of practice and are subject to scrutiny by the NFER's own ethics committee.

There is a wealth of information available in the form of published literature and data collected in previous research. NFER's team can interrogate and analyse this information for you, to find out what you want to know about health education issues, and healthy eating in particular. Contact us to discuss the research that you need.

We conduct research using a range of methods, from large-scale surveys to smaller in-depth work. We work directly with the professionals in these fields – such as teachers, local authorities,

*The introduction of the Every Child Matters agenda in 2003 heralded a shift in government policy on the education, care and well-being of children and young people in Britain. Schools and agencies working with families were expected to work together as never before, and cooperate on ensuring that the rights of every child were met on five main outcomes: to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being.*

nutritionists and educationalists – as well as with parents, children and young people. Our surveying methods include the use of interviews and questionnaires, but where necessary we can utilise more sensitive approaches such as keypad voting, play-based activities and analysis of children's drawings.

### **More information**

For more information about NFER's work in health education, and for further details of current and previous research projects, go to: [www.nfer.ac.uk/research/wellbeing](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research/wellbeing). Contact us to talk about research we can do for you and your organisation.

## Contact details



Sarah Lynch  
s.lynch@nfer.ac.uk



David Teeman  
d.teeman@nfer.ac.uk

Text by Dorothy Lepkowska  
Design and layout by Helen Crawley  
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