

National Assembly for Wales

Children and Young People Committee

CO 39

Inquiry into Childhood Obesity

Evidence from : Cardiff Education Catering

As Appetite for Life Coordinator I work with school caterers, pupils, parents, schools, Dieticians and the Healthy Schools Team towards the Appetite for Life Standards in Cardiff schools.

This response is based on the following facts:

- Childhood obesity is influenced by what children eat and drink in school. Appetite for Life Action Plan (2008).
- School meals are healthier than most packed lunches/food and drink brought into school. Evans, *et al.* (2010). A cross-sectional survey of children's packed lunches in the UK: food- and nutrient-based results. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, **64**, 11.

**Point 2: The measurement, evaluation and effectiveness of Appetite for Life.**

Cardiff Education Catering measure and evaluate their lunchtime provision of food and drink in schools against the Appetite for Life Food and Nutrient Based Standards using nutritional analysis software.

Cardiff Education Catering question the usefulness of meeting the nutrient based standards in secondary schools on the following grounds:

- The analysis of food and drink only provided at lunchtime (with the exception of cakes and biscuits) gives an inaccurate picture of 'lunch' provision. Pupils often purchase all or some of their lunch at break time.
- The assumption that 'provision' is a proxy for 'consumption' is false. There are enough fruit, vegetables and salad to provide all pupils who have school meals with a portion each day but approximately 30% of this is consumed.
- The final report of provision for Cardiff Secondary Schools is an average of an average, which does not reflect any actual consumption by an actual pupil.

Cardiff Education Catering question the usefulness of meeting the food based standards in primary schools on the following grounds:

- Being unable to cook potato products in fat/oil more than twice a week reduces the consumption of school meals. Kitchen Managers have reported more waste and complaints from children when they are not oven cooking the same potato product in a small amount of fat/oil.

- The Primary Schools Menu can achieve the nutrient based standards without achieving the food based standards for potato products cooked in fats/oils.

Cardiff Education Catering does not measure the effectiveness of Appetite for Life on reducing obesity. If meeting the food/nutrient standards means fewer children are consuming school meals then obesity will not be reduced.

### **Point 3. The barriers to reducing the level of childhood obesity in Wales.**

- Children and young people have limited time to eat a balanced meal at school, particularly secondary schools. School lunch times are being continuously eroded. Some schools in Cardiff now only have 25 minutes at lunchtime to queue, eat, socialise and relax in preparation for afternoon lessons. In secondary schools, the sales of single snack items vastly outweigh the sales of balanced meals. Young people want to eat quickly and get out of the busy dining room. This problem is compounded by school policies that forbid food to be taken out of the dining hall. In primary schools, children are often hurried through the dining room out into the playground so that the dining room can be cleared and cleaned ready for afternoon use by the school.
- Parents of primary school children are often unable to purchase school meals on a day by day basis, instead being required to pay for full weeks, ½ terms or full terms in advance. Results from an online survey carried by Cardiff Education Catering in 2012 (N = 570) indicated that 38% of parents thought that, 'Payment options for single or multiple days,' would encourage them to choose school meals more often.
- Primary school children who have packed lunches and school meals are often segregated in the dining room. Results from the aforementioned survey indicated that 1 in 10 parents giving their children packed lunches did so because, 'Their child's friends have packed lunches.' 54% of all parents thought that, 'Allowing children having school meals to sit with children having packed lunches,' would encourage them to choose school meals more often.

If fewer children are able to access school meals then obesity will not be reduced.

### **Point 4. Improvements and additional actions.**

Cardiff Education Catering endorses the recommendations made from the Welsh Government's Action Appetite for Life Research Project (2008-2012) which highlighted that, 'As part of a whole school approach schools should consider:'

- 'Whether the lunchtime arrangements allow sufficient time for eating and other activities.' Cardiff Education Catering are in favour of a return to the traditional 'lunch hour' of 60 minutes so children and young people can enjoy eating and develop their social skills. Half of this 'lunch hour' should be protected from other activities, similar to the 'protected mealtime' policy in the National Health Service.
- 'Seating children (particularly Primary) together in friendship groups regardless of whether they are eating school meals or their own packed lunch.'

Cardiff Education Catering have provided primary schools with 'Audit Guidance Notes for the Collection of School Income' which stipulates that:

'All schools must ensure that all the following payment options are available:

- Payment for single or multiple days;
- Payment for a week in advance; and
- Payment for half term or full term can be offered in addition to 1 & 2.'

Payments in respect of School Meals can be restricted to one day in a week but this day should not be a Monday. Mondays can be a payment day but not the only payment day. Schools are able to restrict payments to a specific hour of the day i.e. 9 – 10am. The requirement to buy meals in 5 day 'blocks' or pay more than a week in advance should cease.'