



## **Food and Drink purchased 'Through the School Gate'**

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### **Summary of the schools involved in the TTSG project**

#### **School 1:**

School 1 is in East London. It is a mixed academy for pupils aged 11 to 19. It converted to an academy less than 10 years ago. It currently has an 'Outstanding' Ofsted report. Recent data shows that between 400-450 students within the school are eligible for Free School Meals, which is less than 50% of the total student population. Other data shows that the % of pupils eligible for FSM at any time during the past 6 years is 70.6% - a great deal higher than the national average over this same time (29.1%). The proportion of students eligible for additional government funding (the pupil premium) is well above that found nationally. This includes students who are eligible for free school meals and looked after students. About three-quarters of students have a first language other than English. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is much higher than that found nationally

It is located within walking distance from several tube stations.

The academy is in East London and there are a wide range of retailers selling food and drink, including supermarkets (Tesco's), chain takeaways (McDonalds, KFC, subway) and other independent takeaways (chicken shops, pizza takeaway, kebab shops). These are all open by the time school finishes at 3.30pm. There are also off licences and newsagents as well as greengrocers along the same main road. Many of the students reported that they visited these shops after school to buy food and drink.

The school is new and is very open plan when you enter. There are two outdoor playgrounds, which are separated for years 8 and 10 in one and 7, 9 and 11 in the other. There are table tennis tables in the playground and access to a MUGA football pitch that can be used at brunch and lunch time.

The canteen is at the centre of the school, it is open plan and bright with lots of tables and chairs. Students have 40 minutes for lunch. Food can only be eaten in the canteen and not in the playground – both hot meals and packed lunches at lunch time. Students have access to either the main canteen where they can buy hot school meals (a meat or vegetarian option, jacket potatoes or pasta) or a separate area where hot paninis can be purchased along with other cold food.

Brunch is at 11am and students can buy snacks from as little as 50p, we observed many students buying pasta pots or pizza breads from the canteen. One student had two pasta pots. It was noted in the questionnaire that students who received FSM were not able to buy food at brunch as well as at lunch (though we need to confirm in our interview with the SLT how much students receive for their FSM). It was noticeable that there were no drinks for sale – but fresh water was available in jugs at lunch time. Not sure about break time.

The menu is changed every three months and is on a 3-weekly cycle. A meal deal costs £2 and includes soup, a main meal and a pudding. There is tap water available to all from jugs on a table in

the canteen. However, we noticed that very few students were actually drinking at all. There were a number of girls who sat at the tables with their friends but did not eat anything.

There is a strict system with queuing to access the lunch queue involving tokens to make sure no one pushes in and queues start in the playground and are separated between hot and cold food queues and a teacher sends groups in in small numbers. The teaching staff are in charge of directing students around the canteen. There are no dinner ladies, and kitchen staff remained behind the serving hatch.

The staff suggested that around 85% of students ate food from the canteen, so a high portion of students buy their meals from school. Sixth form students are allowed to leave the school at lunch time, but most are now choosing to stay during lunch and consume the school meals. With a high ethnic population, the kitchen staff mentioned that during Ramadan/Eid food consumption is reduced and they must be aware of this to avoid food waste.

## **School 2:**

School 2 is in East London. It is a comprehensive, mixed community school for students aged 11-16. The school moved sites previously and is now a large, modern building with enhanced facilities. It currently has a 'good' Ofsted report). Recent data shows that over 100 pupils are eligible for Free School Meals, which is less than 20% of the total pupil population. Other government data shows that less than 50% of the students have a first language other than English, and during the past 6 years less than 45% of the students have been eligible for Free School Meals – both well above the national average.

The school is located on the corner of a busy road and junction. In the morning the front and back gates to the school are unlocked and doors are open, after the bell goes the gates are locked and the only way in is to buzz through to reception and ask them to open the doors for you. It is very difficult for any students to leave or 'sneak out' of school because of the security around the school. Only students who have a lunch time pass and permission from their parents/guardian to eat their lunch at home are allowed to leave the school at lunch time.

Outside the school there were a lot of retailers in very close proximity to the school. This included a fried chicken shop and a fish and chip shop as well as small independent supermarkets/corner shops, a café, a large co-op and according to the staff a large Tescos (although we did not find this when we walked around). The café was expensively priced, with a meal costing over £6. These places were open at lunch time even though they were not expecting students. The chicken shop had very low prices and these were sign posted outside the shop, including 3 chicken wings and chips for £2. During the retailer interviews we will need to ask if these are priced for the students or if they change their prices after school.

In the opposite direction is a Street Market. Though the site showed no signs of a market, Monday isn't a usual day for a street market. The High street has been given a substantial make-over recently and has a modern cosmopolitan feel, the food shops didn't appear to be aimed at the secondary school age group. There was an independent supermarket with a wide variety of fresh vegetables, a couple of boutique coffee shops and several smart looking cafés. Most of the shops weren't food outlets, e.g. a jeweller, independent clothes shops, charity shops, independent furniture shops etc. En route to the High Street, about five minutes' walk from the school, there is a small corner shop - newsagent/tobacconist/sweets etc.

The school canteen was very bright and open, with a seating area to one side with large wooden steps where a lot of students sit to eat their packed lunches or hot wraps/snacks at break and lunch time. The canteen can seat about 150-160 students and lunch times are staggered by about 5-10 minutes so that each year group can get first choice of food at least one day a week.

The school was built within the last five years and was very light, bright and open.

The school serves over 650 students a day at lunch time, more on a Friday when it is Fish and Chip day.

### **School 3**

School 3 is a modern school, with very comprehensive student facilities. It is located a rural part of Essex, adjoining a small local village. About 50% of students walk to school, and those who live further away are driven or take the bus. The bus ride can be up to 45 minutes in duration due to the poor state of the roads in the area.

Our interview with staff clearly defined the student cohort as decidedly 'middle class' in the main, and it was commented upon that this is reflected in the students' tastes – they sought sushi for the school menu, the school catering staff make their own yoghurts for sale, and the popular salad bar includes products such as quinoa. It was noted that the school's catchment area has quite discerning tastes. However, while acknowledging the wealth of the school community overall, it was noted that they do also see families in crisis who are victims of rural deprivation and poverty. However, it was agreed to incidence of this was lower than in urban areas. Staff are aware that there is a small proportion of students who are not eating enough, and they have to help them occasionally. These students are not necessarily on the FSM, and sometimes problems are due to parental cashflow issues.

While the student body was described as 'pretty monocultural', it was estimated that about 200 students were from a BAME background. The school makes an effort to introduce students to a range of different cultural experiences, where food sometimes features strongly. Examples of this are celebrations around cultural festivals such as Diwali and Chinese New Year.

The school has access to a farm which grows a range of produce that is used by the catering staff in the preparation of school meals. They also have access to animals, such as ducks and chickens..

There are a number of students who vary their eating behaviours through the week, bringing a packed lunch twice a week and purchasing food on campus the rest of the time. About 150 students eat a packed lunch each day out of a total student cohort of over 2000. Students with packed lunches must sit outside the main canteen, and only students who purchase food on campus are permitted to eat there. This causes consternation from students who feel it segregates them and means they cannot sit with their friends for lunch. However, it is clear that crowding and space restrictions lie at the heart of this school policy. There are two seatings for lunch each day, with students divided into two groups (Yrs 7 & 8; Yrs 9, 10 & 11).

The school has a range of food outlets and seating areas for students. Apart from the main canteen, there are also two picnic areas and an outside 'pod' which also has a kiosk that serves 'fast' food such as bacon and sausage rolls, burgers, hot chicken sandwiches, pasta, etc. However, students reported that the 'pod' facility was poorly maintained and was often too cold to use given variable weather and its situation outside.

The school provides an outstanding array of choices across their food outlets and are proud of this. They are also interested in support students to make their own choices. Apart from offerings such as soups, salads, baguettes, and sandwiches, snacks such as yoghurt and fruit pots are available, and cakes are limited to one a day per students. The main meal option includes two kinds of vegetable (usually including potato) and both meat and vegetarian options are available. It also includes a pudding and a drink, and costs £2.30. There are set days with specific hot meal options such as Pie Day, Curry Day, Fish & Chips Friday, etc. Following student consultation, a number of vegan options have also been introduced. There is also a 'cold' meal deal for a sandwich, bottle of water, and cake or fruit for £2.30. The school uses the biometric fingerprint system for food payments. Of the student body, less than 50 students are on the FSM scheme. However, quite a few students noted they regularly had to buy lunch for other students/friends who had no money or food to eat, though conceded there may be a number of reasons for this.

However, despite the staff emphasis on choice and variety, the students complained of 'boredom' around eating on campus and the food that is available to them. While they acknowledged there is a lot of choice, they said they only liked a few things which they grew tired of. Further, these items were often the most popular across the board and sold out quickly. This is especially a problem on days when students are in the second lunch sitting. They noted the canteen was too small for the number of students, seating only 400 at a time.

In terms of purchasing food before and/or after school, students and staff noted that nearby shops were very limited. Students noted a few shops in the village including a Tesco Express, a fish & chip shop, Nisa, Starbucks, a bakery, Costcutter, and an independent sweet shop. While a few outlets were noted, these did not seem to be convenient for students or on their school route. As such, the culture of purchasing food outside the school is relatively limited.

#### **School 4:**

The Academy is a mixed, comprehensive, faith-based secondary school in Essex, accommodating students from 11 – 18 years old. There are currently approx. 1200 students registered. There are approximately 40 food outlets/restaurants/shops around the school, less than 6% of the students are eligible for free school meals, equating to under 50 students in the school, which is some way below the national average. Statistics from the government website for the school suggest that over the last 6 years 12% of all students attending there were eligible for free school meals at one time. 2.2% of the students do not have English as their first language (which is, again, well below the national average of around 17%).

The school is set on a large campus, with modern buildings and facilities. It is located in Essex, and many students access the school by tube. The school canteen is the main eating area, with staggered lunch sittings in the adjoining multi-purpose hall. There is also a vending machine for student use to purchase drinks.

The school's catering is contracted to a company which has retained the school's catering contract for over a decade. This contract is renewed, and the menu reviewed every three years, following a comprehensive consultation with student and parent representatives, and governors. The catering company is responsible for maintaining the requirements of this standard, including the use of organic foods only, no pre-packaged meats, and all food is made 'from scratch'.

The school was an active participant in the Healthy Schools programme. While the ethos of the program still informs school food policy and practice, the active programme has lapsed as the staff member who originally lead it has left the school. Staff reported very significant shifts in food trends and student tastes over the last 13 years. Healthier options have been introduced, often at the request of students themselves. A few years ago, the school trialled a salad bar, which was very unpopular. The salad bar has recently been reintroduced and is now very popular with students. Following student requests, the catering company is currently in the process of catering to vegan students with a dedicated menu.

The school operates a staggered seating during the lunch hour. On Mondays/Wednesdays/Fridays, the senior students are scheduled for the first sitting, and on Tuesdays/Thursdays, the junior students sit first. Lunch starts at 12:20pm, with hot food ceased at 1:10pm and the tills shut at 1:20pm. At morning break time, the school manages large student numbers and space restrictions by directing Key Stage 4 (Yrs 10, 11, some Sixth Formers) to the hall, while Yrs 7, 8 & 9 must queue outside the building and access their food from the serving hatch.

Students are permitted to bring food from home (packed lunch) and/or purchase food on campus. Of the student cohort, 10-15% were estimated to bring a packed lunch each day, while the vast majority purchase food on campus. Years 7-11 must remain in the school grounds at all times during the school day, while Years 12 and 13 are permitted to leave the school at lunch to purchase food outside. Years 12 and 13 also have a separate, dedicated café on campus, selling paninis, coffee, and other food. A Breakfast Club is run each morning for students and is available to all year groups. Menus run a two-weekly timetable. The school has a biometric fingerprint system in place for food payments, and parents can top up accounts and check on their child's spending and consumption habits online.

It was noted that the school has quite an established culture of purchasing food before and/or after school from nearby shops. Students suggested this was because of the high price of food on campus, the lack of choice, and the problem of queueing for food purchased in school. Of these shops, the local Sainsbury's is the most popular, with many students visiting before and after school, and some purchasing their food for the day there prior to arriving on campus. The nearest set of shops to the school includes a Nisa, a fish and chip shop, and a newsagent. However, the High Street is also popular, especially since some students alight the tube near there. There are a wide variety of food outlets on the high street. This is also a preferred destination for some students to socialise and eat on 'shortened Tuesdays', when the school closes at midday.

Some mentions were made of breaches of school rules that happen relatively regularly, and centre around food. Staff noted some students buy food on offer at Sainsbury's or buy food in multi-packs and take them to school to sell on individually to students for a profit. Students also have ordered food for delivery to the school gate, such as Domino's. Some parents also bring food to the school gate for their children, such as McDonald's. Where these transgressions are caught, the food is confiscated. Staff also suggested students were unhappy with regulations around condiments and seasoning, and get around this by bring ketchup, mayonnaise, and salt and pepper from home.

There are approximately 150 students on the FSM scheme, identified by the local authority. The biometric system removes the stigma that can be associated with FSM students, as all students must pay using their fingerprint. The daily FSM allowance starts from 11:30am – students cannot access their FSM funds prior to this time, and as such, it does not cover Breakfast Club or break time. This policy was instituted as it was found that students were spending all their allowance on snacks at

break and not having a proper meal at lunchtime. No drink is included with FSM meal deals, though free water is provided.