



Six top tips for getting started on a new school food contract

Join forces

Heads, parents, governors, midday supervisors, council officers, public health leads and, of course, children have very clear ideas about what they want from a school meal service. They all need to be heard, so put together a School Meals Working Party, either at your school or within the local authority. Agree terms of reference, set regular meetings and draw up a timetable with clear goals.

Don't forget the customers

Regular meetings to discuss the procurement process could be baffling for primary children and tiresome for teenagers, so make sure your school has a platform for student voice. This can be the school council or a food specific group, such as a school nutrition action group (SNAG). The Head, or a member of the senior leadership team, can then represent students at Working Party meetings.

Parent power

Remember that you have a wonderful communication platform within the school grounds - the playground! Getting your parents excited about your plans to improve school meals is essential to ensure good take-up. Take them on your journey by getting positive messages out through your parent reps and newsletters. Survey Monkey provides an easy way to reach lots of parents to find out what they want. For a better response rate, offer a prize for the first parent to complete the survey or for the year group/class with the most parent submissions.

Be ambitious

The fun part of any procurement process is the scoping stage. Ensure that your group has a moment when all the members have a chance to share their vision of an excellent school meal service. Aim high and put together a list of what's essential and what's desirable, so that your specification has a built-in plan for continued improvement. Think about accreditation to give you quality assurance. Look at the Soil Association's Food for Life scheme. If Bronze is your minimum standard, make Silver your next step under 'desirable', and put a deadline on it.

Seeing is believing

If you're struggling with an under-performing, uninspiring meal service, it's hard to imagine what great looks like. Look around your borough or region to find a school that is enjoying the service you're aiming for. Arrange a site visit for your group and make sure you can talk to the children, the midday supervisors and the kitchen staff, and encourage them to share the secrets of their success. If you can find a school with similar facilities and challenges to yours, it may help you avoid the "it's alright for them but..." arguments! If you're having trouble finding a star school, see if there's a Food for Life awarded school close by and look for Silver or Gold.

Meet the experts

There are expert organisations out there with good folk who will speak passionately, inspire your group to aim high and give you confidence that the job can be done. The very best place to start is right here at School Food Matters and we'll help you on your way.

Good luck!