LACA has issued the following response to the School Food Plan:

LACA is pleased that the School Food Plan process has focused attention on the vital role of school food in child development and improving educational attainment. LACA particularly welcomes the emphasis on increased uptake of school meals and the role everyone has to play in ensuring a holistic approach in providing good food.

Going forward, Anne Bull Chair of LACA, is keen to highlight the need for a ‘whole school’ approach to school food, everybody has to play their part to ensure that the plan is a success. The Department for Education has a number of experts in school food available to support and enact the recommendations of this plan and, as the professional body representing the school food industry, LACA is committed to being actively involved in the implementation of this plan.

LACA will continue to urge the Education Secretary to address the following as priorities and in doing so, ensure that all children benefit from nutritious food in our schools:

- Food standards must be applicable to all schools in England and not just the state maintained schools – one standard for all.
- Food standards must be mandatory in regulation format for all schools.
- School food must be included in the OFSTED inspection report for all schools in England

Representing the country’s largest network providing school catering, LACA believes every child, regardless of the type of school they attend, should benefit from a healthy school meal. We offer the Government our ongoing support to ensure measures are implemented which will enshrine the importance of school food in education and health policy for future generations.

What will the School Food Plan mean for the school food catering industry?

LACA believes that successful implementation of the School Food Plan will:

1. Encourage a whole school approach to food that will see head teachers, caterers and parents all taking an active role in ensuring that children eat well, with practical training for head teachers on food and nutrition

2. Enshrine healthy school food as an integral part of the school day with Ofsted committed to inspecting behaviour in canteens and ‘healthy approaches’ as part of its remit
3. Ensure that school meals are economically viable through increased uptake of school food and greater economies of scale

**Recommendations of the School Food Plan**

- A £16.1 million injection of cash from the Department for Education over the next two years. This includes £11.8 million that organisations such as the Children's Food Trust and the Food For Life Partnership can bid for to help turn around schools that are struggling with their lunch service, £3.15 million to ensure healthy breakfasts are available for thousands of children who arrive at school hungry.

- A practical checklist for headteachers, listing the most important things they or their team can do so that they can make a big difference to take-up and food culture in schools. The checklist is based on the examples of what is working well that the reviewers have seen on their trips to over 60 schools in the country. They are designed to be pinned up in the head’s office and the kitchen. Suggested actions include:

  - Lowering the price of school meals - consider subsidising school meals for your reception and year 7 classes for the first term, or offer discounts for parents of multiple children or those whose children eat a school lunch every day;
  
  - Teachers should be encouraged to eat with the children in the dining hall;
  
  - Have a stay-on-site rule for break and lunch time;
  
  - Have a cashless payment system to shorten queuing times and prevent free school meal children from being stigmatised;
  
  - Make sure packed lunches are not more exciting than school lunches. Actively discourage sugary drinks, crisps and confectionery, or offer prizes and other incentives for bringing in a healthy lunch. Or ban packed lunches altogether;
  
  - The launch of two flagship London boroughs to help prove that better school food can have a significant impact on children's health and attainment. Every school in each area will receive coordinated support from expert organisations such as the Children's Food Trust to improve the quality and take up of school meals and spread great food culture through the wider community. The Department for Education and the Mayor's Office will jointly fund the boroughs.
  
  - The Department for Education will test and introduce a set of revised food based standards (built on a nutritional framework), with the intention of applying them to maintained schools and all new academies and free schools by September 2014.
• Ofsted will amend its guidance to inspectors to consider behaviour and culture in the dining hall and the way a school promotes healthy lifestyles.

The full plan can be found here: http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/plan/

Background notes

INTRODUCTION

Following the introduction of nutritional standards in 2007, there have been huge improvements in the standard of school food meals. However, there are still issues around school meal provision which remain a concern. In particular, academies and free schools are not currently required to adhere to the 2007 nutritional standards, creating an uneven standard of service and meals. Moreover, these nutritional standards do not apply to packed lunches in any school.

In July 2012 the Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove Commissioned the School Food Review on the back of research conducted by the School Food Trust.

The School Food Trust research showed that:

• Take-up of school lunches is just 38% in secondary schools and 44% in primary schools;
• Only 22.5% of schools provide at least one portion of fruit and veg per pupil every day;
• Half of secondary schools offer pizzas and starchy food cooked in oil on most days;
• A third of young people are not choosing a healthy balanced meal at school.

Mr Gove noted that whilst over the last decade the quality of school food had improved dramatically there was still much more to be done to ensure all pupils eat a healthy lunch. He asked Henry Dimbleby and John Vincent, founders of the Leon chain of restaurants, to develop a school food plan which would “significantly increase the number of children eating good food in schools, and to determine the role of food, cooking and growing fruit and vegetables in schools.”

LACA’S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SCHOOL FOOD PLAN

LACA has been involved in the process from the outset, with the National Chair representing LACA on the ‘Expert Panel’ and many regional members welcoming the authors to their local areas to discuss school food provision.

In May 2013, LACA wrote to the School Food Plan Team at the Department for Education to urge that the following points should be included in the School Food Plan:

• Food standards must be applicable to all schools in England and not just the state maintained schools
• Food standards must be mandatory in regulation format for all schools. In addition to the state maintained schools, academies and free schools will need to comply with the food standards
• School food must be included in the OFSTED inspection report for all schools in England. It could for example be included in the “leadership” criteria or as a report about how the school embraces healthy eating. It has to be more than a governor being responsible for school food or a “tick box” sheet. This could also be included in the parent’s annual report from the Chair of Governors. LACA members are of the view that the success of the plan will require a “whole school approach” as caterers’ cannot do it alone.

• LACA members welcome the news that cooking will be featuring once more on the school curriculum. In addition to the practical cooking skills, it is hoped that more food education and nutrition will also be included. This would enable children and young people to learn about the importance of food and nutrition together with the benefits that result from a healthy diet.

• LACA has identified that a practical accredited qualification specific to our sector of the catering industry would be beneficial and would be a recognition of the skills and expertise in the school kitchens in England. This has been discussed at Panel meetings and LACA would welcome membership and perhaps a lead role on a working group to progress with this idea.

About LACA

LACA is the professional association for school food, representing 750 Catering Managers in local authorities, private contractors, and individual schools providing primary and secondary school meal services in England, Wales and Scotland.

LACA has 350 Associate Members who are leading suppliers and manufacturers of food, drink, equipment and services to the school catering sector. With 135 local authorities represented in the membership, 80% of the education catering service is provided by LACA members and with around 3 million lunches being served every day in 22,000 schools, the LACA network is the country’s largest provider of school catering. This is reflected in LACA’s mission statement - “Together we achieve excellence in school food”.

For further information please:
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