



Hungry for Change

What Parents and Pupils Want from Food Education

Executive Summary

This report examines parental and pupil attitudes to food education in England's schools, building on Best Food Forward's Food Education Mapping Project (FEMP)¹ which found that food education is most effective when children are able to 'Learn it, See it, Live it'. Drawing on nationally representative polling of over 2,000 parents and 2,000 young people aged 11-18, this report reveals strong public support for food education as an essential life skill, alongside findings that current provision in schools is fragmented, inconsistent, and insufficient to equip young people to apply what they learn in real life.

Parents and pupils overwhelmingly agree that cooking healthy meals and making good food choices are core life skills, comparable in importance to time management and digital literacy. Parents see schools as playing a crucial role alongside families in developing these skills. Practical, hands-on learning is highly valued by both groups and is seen as one of the strongest aspects of existing food education provision.

However, the research identifies a significant gap between aspiration and reality. Fewer than half of young people report receiving dedicated curriculum time for food education, with access declining sharply with age and varying significantly by income, school type, and region. State-educated and lower-income pupils are markedly less likely to receive sustained food education than their more affluent or independently educated peers, reinforcing existing inequalities.

Beyond the classroom, food education is rarely embedded consistently across the wider school environment. While

pupils commonly encounter posters or one-off themed events on the topic of food and nutrition, fewer experience sustained activities such as clubs, links to wider food initiatives and guest speakers integrated into school life. Many young people report that school food provision does not align with what they are taught about healthy eating, undermining the credibility and impact of classroom learning.

Critically, opportunities for young people to "live it" – to apply food knowledge and skills outside of school – are limited and unevenly distributed. Parents express low confidence in children's ability to cook from fresh ingredients, and young people from lower-income households are significantly less likely to feel confident preparing food independently. Young people with limited access to regular, participatory and shared food experiences at school are more likely to have weaker feelings of connection and belonging through food. Budget constraints, time pressures, and limited exposure to cooking at home all act as barriers, meaning that food education too often fails to translate into lifelong habits and skills.

These findings come at a pivotal moment, as government investment in school food provision expands through free breakfast clubs, wider eligibility for free school meals, and revised school food standards. Without high-quality food education embedded alongside these reforms, the long-term benefits of this investment will not be fully realised.

¹ Best Food Forward, Food Education Mapping Project 2025

To address these challenges, Best Food Forward recommends a whole-school approach to food education that embeds learning across curriculum, culture, and practice. Best Food Forward calls on the government to:

1

Make food a core subject for all – extend and prioritise food education as a core subject across Key Stages 1-4, on par with subjects like PSHE, citizenship and PE, with its importance reflected in consistent curriculum time and ensuring wider opportunities to ‘Learn it, See it, Live it’ across the whole school.

2

Appoint school food leads - require MATs to appoint a specialist food education lead responsible and accountable for embedding a whole school approach to food learning, encompassing provisioning and ensuring food education allows children to ‘Learn it, See it, Live it’. For local authority run schools, the local authority should appoint a food lead responsible for the maintained schools in their area.

For many children food learning is not just about ensuring healthy, nutritious food choices into adulthood, it provides an opportunity for high quality careers from food production to nutrition, from food safety to food service, from dietetics to food policy. But the removal of A levels in Food Technology and Food and Nutrition has limited these opportunities at a time when more and more young people are leaving school to no further education, employment or training. Best Food Forward calls on the government to:

3

Restore Food A-level - ensuring there are formal assessment pathways at A-level into careers in food preparation, production and nutrition, as an important part of the government’s review into study options for food and nutrition at Level 3.

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