

**Visit: Comber Grove School, Comber Grove, SE5 0LQ**  
**Date: 26 June 2012**

**Present:** Richard Dax, Head teacher  
Lian Beadell, Accent Catering manager  
Cllr David Hubber (Chair)  
Cllr the Right Reverend Emmanuel Oyewole (Vice Chair)  
Colin Elliott (parent governor representative)  
Colin Gale, FHSM project lead  
Julie Timbrell, Scrutiny Project manager

### **Catering arrangement**

The school uses an external caterer; Accent. All the food is prepared in the school kitchen. The menu changes every three weeks and the catering staff report that they are in constant conversations with children about the meals.

### **Lunchtime arrangements**

The head teacher explained that lunch is served in dual-purpose school hall in separate sittings. The dining room is used for sports, music and other activities.

### **Universal Free Healthy School Meals (FHSM)**

The head explained that the school has around 49 % take up of school meals. The FHSM initiative has added a considerable number of children consuming school dinners, with numbers expected to double as other schools years join.

The figures for Comber Grove as at Summer term return were:

Reception	93%	41 pupils
Year 1	85%	39 pupils

Space is at premium in the school and both the dining area and kitchen have capacity issues. The kitchen has received local authority investment to improve the old-fashioned equipment, with a new dishwasher and comby cooker ordered. Catering staff reported that further funding is needed for more upgrading of equipment and to streamline space so it can be used more efficiently, as the need for more capacity grows. The Head noted the added financial burden of the initiative with the need to upgrade kitchen and peripherals (plates, tables, and cutlery). Colin Gale reported that this is one of the reasons for phasing and that Comber Grove is not alone in facing capacity issues, which is why the council increased the funding for investment in catering facilities.

The Head reported that he thought that the FHSM had helped remove the stigma of free schools meals.

### **Children and parents' input into the menu**

The catering company holds taster days for parents to encourage take up. Questionnaires have been used and feedback has been very positive.

Children's are given questionnaires every 6 weeks and the school council is consulted.

There are themed days for children organised by the in-house catering, for example on the Jubilee day and American Independence Day. These were very successful social occasions.

International food days, and 'bring and share' during the summer fair, are very popular; the summer fair event has turned partly into a food festival. This is not organised by the in-house catering company.

### **Links to gardening, urban agriculture and farming**

The school has some planters and the children help to grow food. The grounds are small, but good use is made of the limited space.

### **Healthy eating**

The school has a strong arts and drama programme, with a theatre at the top of the school. The school put on a Healthy Eating theatre production: All's Well That Eats Well, by the Caboodle Art Company.

### **Serving arrangements**

Traditional tables are used with flight trays. The children are encouraged to make menu choices as they line up.

The school has an ethos that children should eat two servings of vegetables, salad or fruit and the Head actively promote this. All parents and catering staff know that children must have vegetables, salads or fruit on their plates. The Head wrote a letter to all parents insisting on the importance of five a day and eating vegetables, however this was modified so that fruit would count, as there was a minor uproar!

The Head has conducted school assemblies on dinning skills, such as using a knife and fork properly.

Teachers are encouraged to eat in the canteen.

### **Children's comments**

The children made lots of positive comment about the meals and healthy eating and complimented many of the menu items.

### **Observations**

Virtually all the children appeared to be eating a large amount of vegetables. The vegetarian meal did not contain a large amount of protein. The quality the food was fairly good.

The children were very positive about their meals, and the social atmosphere was good, with the children eating and interacting well.