

# food in schools

within the West Midlands

Food in Schools  
Survey 2007



**Birmingham**

## Obesity and Children ▶▶

Obesity among children is spiralling and tackling obesity is a national priority. In July 2004 a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target was set to 'halt the year on year rise in obesity among children under 11 by 2010 in the context of a broader strategy to tackle obesity in the population as a whole'. This target has been superseded by a broader long-term ambition with an initial focus on children: 'By 2020, we aim to reduce the proportion of overweight and obese children to 2000 levels'.

The Foresight report (2007) – 'Tackling Obesities: future choices' has taken a strategic overview of the issue of obesity. By 2050 the Foresight modelling indicates about 25% of children under 16 could be obese ([www.foresight.gov.uk](http://www.foresight.gov.uk))

As part of a multi-faceted approach to tackling obesity school food has undergone huge change in the last three years:

## Transforming School Food

New standards for school food have been introduced covering food not only served at lunch times but across the whole school day. This work is being led by the School Food Trust [www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk)

## Healthy Schools

The Healthy Schools Programme has been transformed with a target for all schools to be on the programme by December 2009 and 75% of schools to have achieved new healthy school status. The new status involves schools having completed the Healthy Eating Theme which covers a whole range of issues including having a whole school food policy, and pupil and parent involvement in all aspects of the development and implementation of healthy food throughout the school day. [www.healthyschools.org.uk](http://www.healthyschools.org.uk)

## Food in Schools Programme

In 2005 the Department of Health introduced the Food in Schools Programme which looks at food across the school day. A toolkit for schools is available online to support developing food in schools activities in line with healthy eating criteria for national healthy schools status. [www.foodinschools.org](http://www.foodinschools.org)

## Food in Schools Audit ▶▶

In order to assess how effectively national priorities and programmes of work on obesity and school food are influencing practice in schools the Department of Health West Midlands undertook a baseline survey of Food in Schools activity in 2005. The 2005 survey focussed on primary schools across the West Midlands. The audit was repeated during the spring term 2007 to measure change since 2005. Additional questions were added in 2007 to measure change resulting from the introduction of new standards for school food, and the new Healthy Schools Programme criteria. The 2007 survey also included secondary, middle, special schools and pupil referral units.

The survey provides a snapshot in time of food in schools activity. The response rate varied between stages of education with a much higher response rate from primary schools than secondary and special schools. We have therefore reported on these sectors separately. There has also been a reduction in the response rate for primary since 2005 although still relatively high. The results say nothing about the representativeness of the sample and this needs to be taken into consideration when looking at the data. However, the results suggest a very positive change in schools and an increase in good practice across the West Midlands. The category 'other' covers PRUs and schools which did not specify which group they fell into.

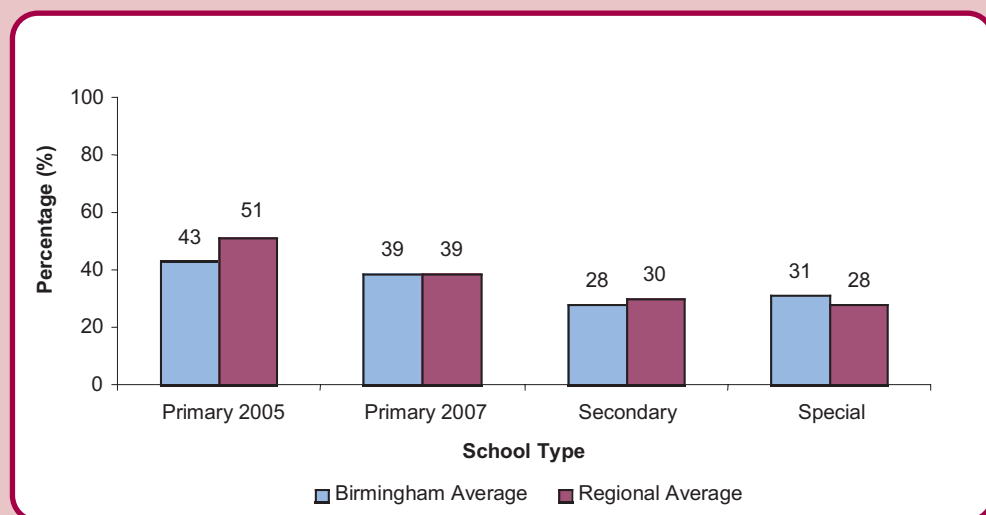
## Headlines ▶▶

- Over three quarters of responding schools reported that they promote healthier lunchboxes to pupils and parents
- Only 19% of primary schools in Birmingham report having a cooking club for pupils
- 85.6% of schools in Birmingham are participating in the national healthy schools programme
- 90% of secondary schools who responded to the survey in Birmingham reported having a whole school food policy (WSFP)
- Free school meal uptake in Birmingham is above average - 83.6% (average 82.5%) primary schools and 79.6% (average 73.5%) of secondary schools. (School Food Trust 2007)

Birmingham Schools	Number of Schools	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)	Range across LEA's (%)
Primary 2005	301	130	43%	38-77%
Primary 2007	310	120	39%	22-58%
Secondary	76	21	28%	11-50%
Special	29	9	31%	0-75%
Other		8		
2007 Total	415	150	36%	21-56%

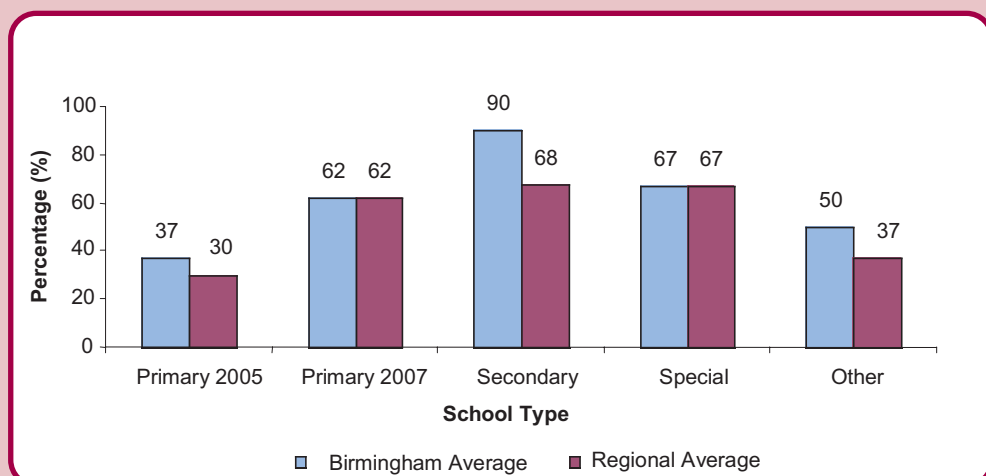
## 1: Response Rate

The regional response rate for primary schools was significantly higher than that for special and secondary schools so we are reporting on the findings for each of these areas separately.



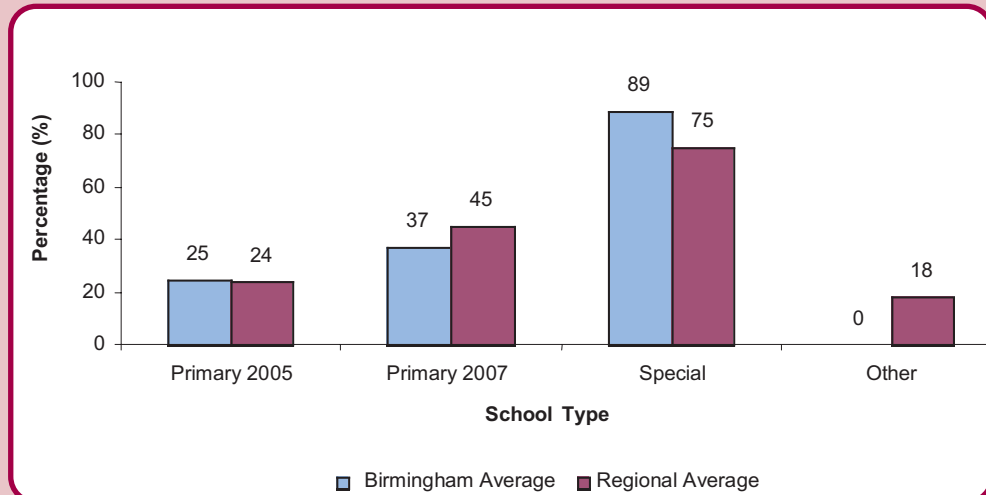
## 2: Does your school have a whole school food policy

Nearly two thirds of primary schools responding to the survey reported having a WSFP, this is nearly twice as many as in 2005. Only two of the secondary schools who responded to the survey did not have a WSFP in place.



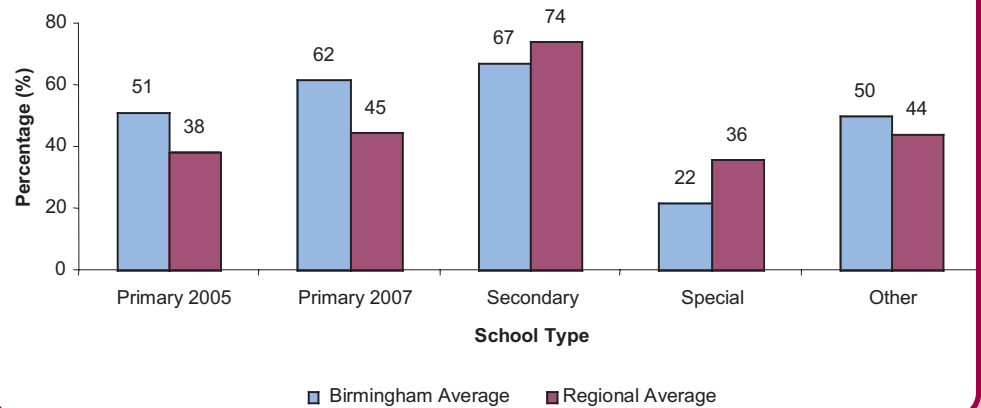
## 3: Does your school provide fruit at Key Stage 2?

Figure 3 shows that although the number of primary schools reporting that they provide KS2 fruit has increased by 12% between 2005 and 2007, the figure is still below the regional average.



## 4: Does your school have a breakfast club?

Since 2005 11% more primary schools in Birmingham are reporting that they provide a breakfast club. This is above the regional average. However, secondary and special schools were less likely to report having a breakfast club than the average for the region.

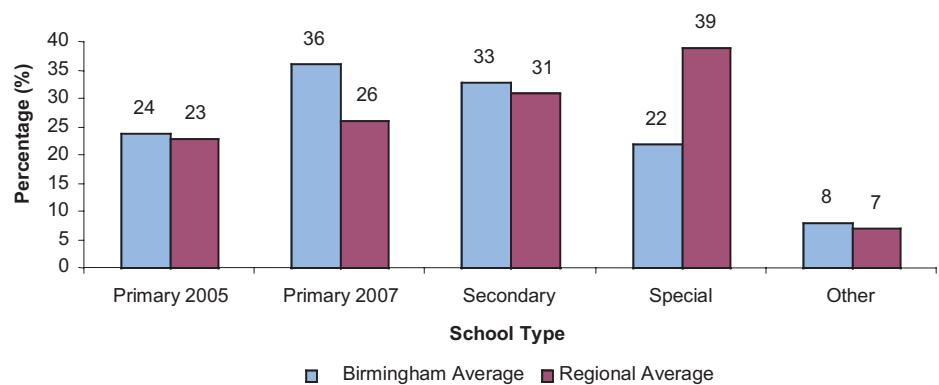


## 5: Does your school have a tuckshop?

Since 2005 Birmingham 12% more primary schools are reporting having a tuckshop. Apart from special schools, Birmingham schools were more likely to have a tuckshop than the regional average.

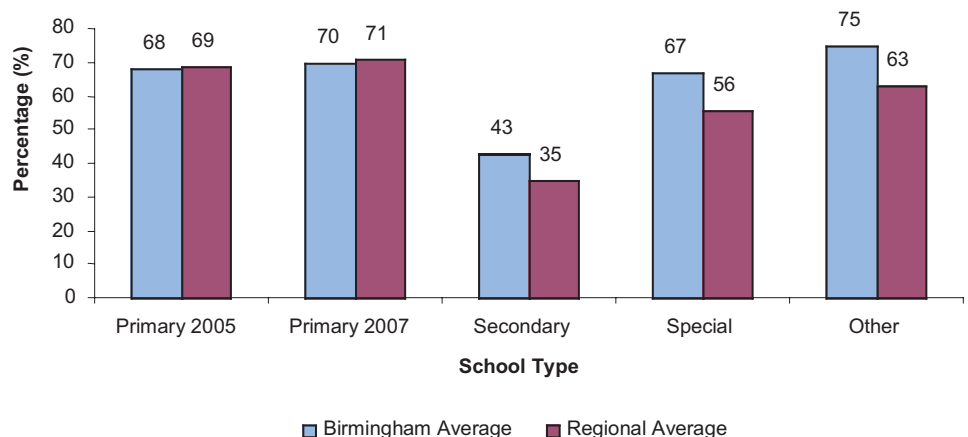
Comments from the surveys suggest the main types of food offered in tuckshops include fruit, milk, toast and plain biscuits. It needs to be noted

that this survey took place before the introduction of national standards for food other than lunch. Biscuits are no longer allowed to be provided in schools under the new standards.



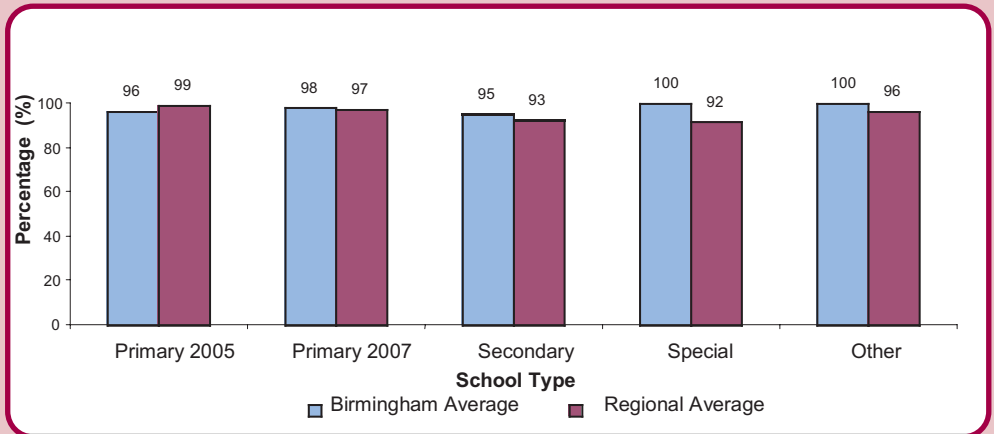
## 6: Does your school have a healthy snacking policy?

A high proportion of primary schools have healthy snacking policies in place. Secondary and special schools were less likely to have a healthy snacking policy than primary schools but this was still above the regional average. Schools were more likely to report having a healthy snacking policy than WSFP.



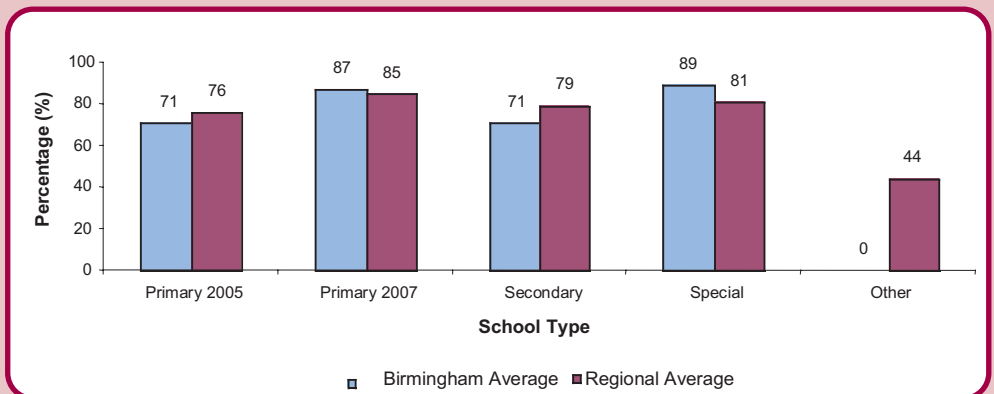
## 7: Does your school provide access to free drinking water?

The majority of the schools who responded to the survey provided access to free drinking water. The regional average was 96% and Birmingham was just above this with 97% providing access to free drinking water.



## 8: Does your school have a dining room that is an attractive and sociable place to eat?

Between 2005 and 2007 the number of primary schools in Birmingham reporting that they had an attractive and sociable dining environment increased by 16%. Primary and special schools were above the regional average but secondary schools scored just below the regional average.

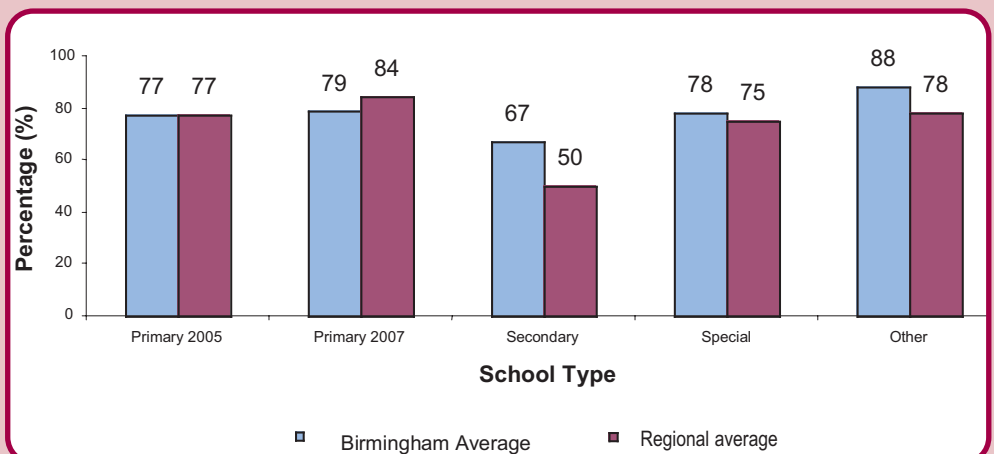


Some of the key themes that were commented on regarding the dining environment included:

- Improvements** - A number of primary schools said they were in the process of developing their dining environments.
- Lack of facilities** - Many primary schools reported that they only had the option to eat in their classrooms or using the school hall for meals rather than having a separate eating area for children.
- Difficulties** - Many schools commented that dining areas were often too small. Schools who used the school hall as a dining area reported that it was difficult to make the school hall an attractive dining area due to its multi-purpose use.
- Examples of good practice** - One school had renovated their dining area into a café style dining room, played music and used fun tablecloths.

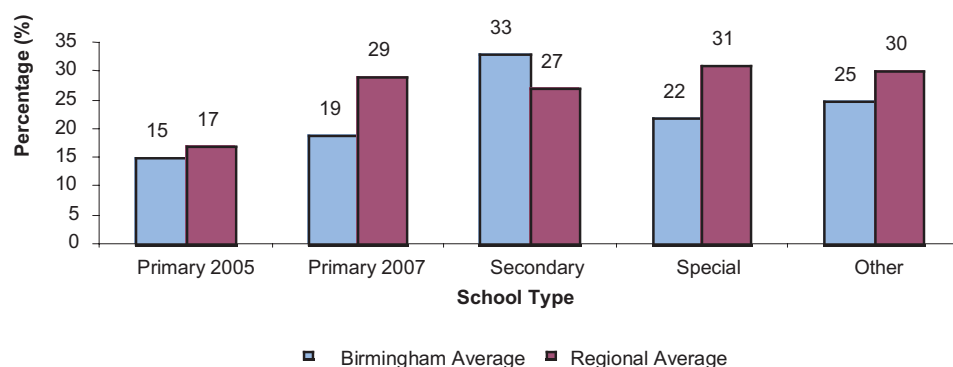
## 9: Does your school promote healthy lunchboxes?

A high proportion of primary schools are promoting healthier lunchboxes in school, 79%, although this is still slightly below the regional average.



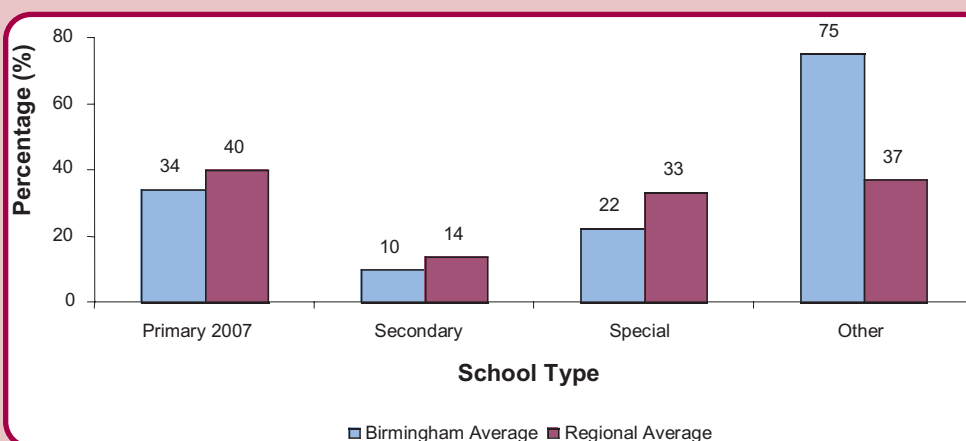
## 10: Does your school have a cooking club?

There has been a slight increase (4%) in the percentage of primary schools reporting having a cooking club, but this is much lower than the regional average.



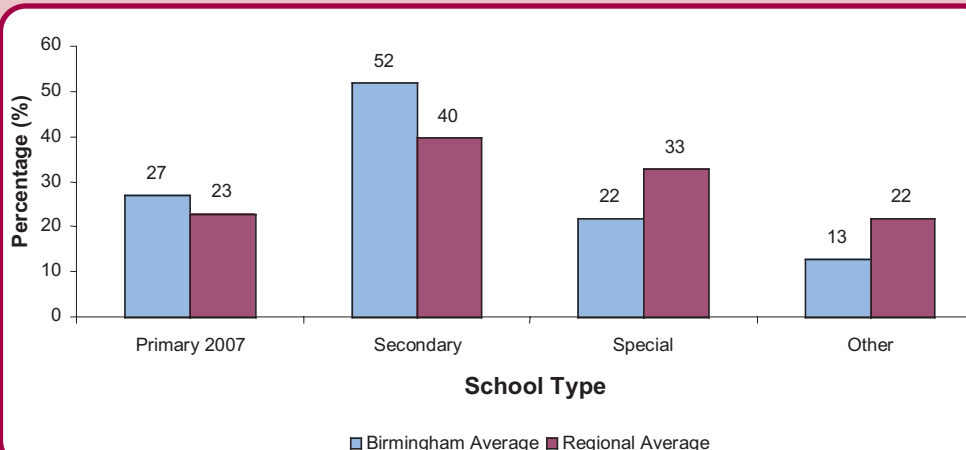
## 11: Does your school have a growing club?

Birmingham has a lower than average number of primary, secondary and special schools reporting that they provide growing clubs for children.



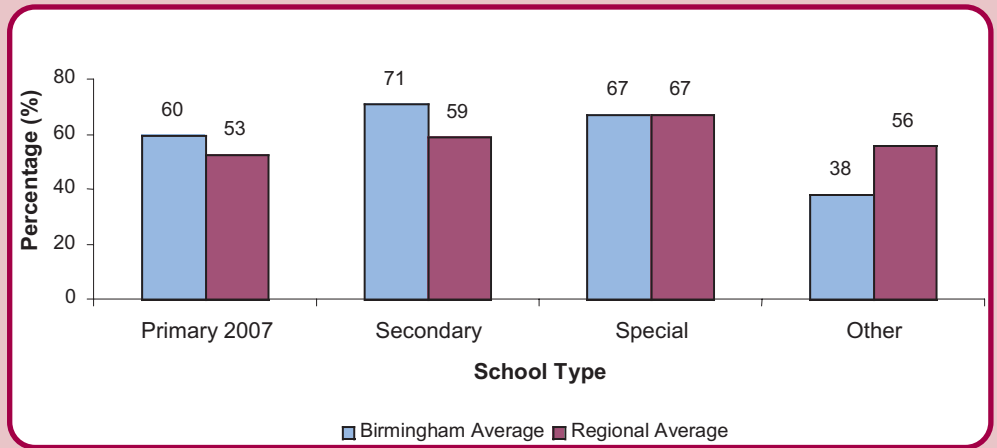
## 12: Does your school have any extended school activities around food in schools?

Primary and secondary schools in Birmingham reported more extended school activities around food in schools than the average for the region, whereas special and 'other' schools were below the regional average.



## 13: Does your school provide opportunities within the school CPD plan for staff training on food related areas in school?

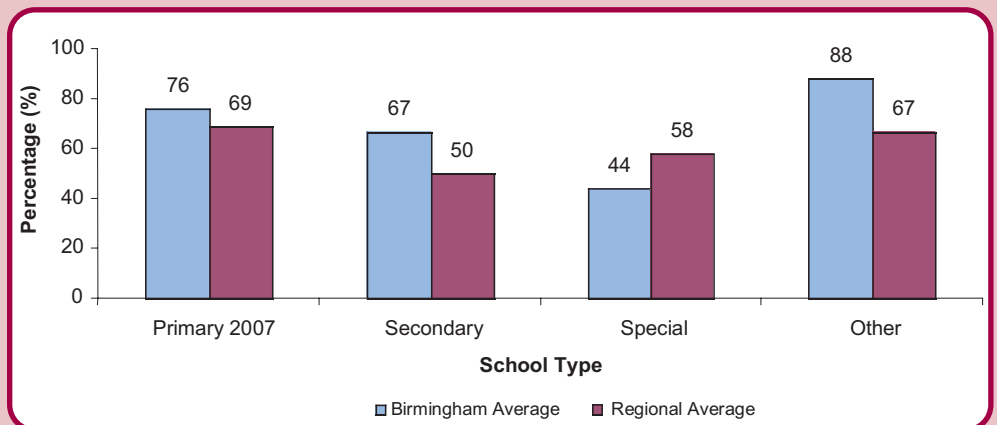
Primary and secondary schools were more likely than the rest of the region to report that they provided opportunities for CPD on food related areas. The majority of personal development provided was in food safety and hygiene.



## 14: Does your school involve parents in school food activities?

Primary, secondary and other schools were more likely to report that they involved parents in school food activities than the average for the region. However, only 44% of special schools involved parents.

The two key areas in which parents are involved in school food activities are through:



1. **Participation in activities** – Parent workshops, tasting sessions and healthy lunchbox training.
2. **Information** - Providing information to parents through newsletters and questionnaires.

# Changes ▶▶

Can you identify any changes children and young people are making to food choices across the school day as a result of new school food guidelines? If yes, what are the changes?



A high proportion of schools identified positive changes children were making to food choices as a result of the introduction of new school food standards. Within Birmingham 84 primary schools, 17 of secondary schools and 5 special schools had noted changes. On further analysis four broad themes emerged including:

## Making healthier choices ▶

Schools reported that children were eating more fruit and vegetables and bringing in healthier lunchboxes. They also reported an increase in school meal uptake and water consumption.

Many of the secondary schools in Birmingham noted that unhealthy snacks had been removed and more healthier sandwiches and drinks were being consumed.

“Menus have changed, pupils love the salad bar. We have fruity Fridays, and pupils always want to show me their healthy lunchboxes. They only drink water or fruit juice.”

## Attitudes ▶

Many schools noted general changes in children’s attitude to healthy food stating they were more health conscious and willing to try new foods.

“Definite change in attitude to food choices - it is ‘cool’ to have a healthy diet. Evidence - lunchboxes, snacks and choice of dinner”

## Knowledge/Awareness and Eating Behaviour ▶

Schools noted a greater awareness of ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’ foods as well as changes in eating behaviour as a result of changes to school food.

“Children are more aware of healthy choices in conversations around their lunchboxes and meals”

## Behaviour ▶

Two primary schools in Birmingham also commented on the change in the children’s behaviour.

“Our children from nursery to year two are able to identify healthy food. They know what is good for their bodies!”

“The children are more settled and able to cope. More focused and improved behaviour”.

## General Comments: ▶▶

Some schools added additional comments to the questionnaire. Two key themes emerged from these around examples of good practice and the difficulties encountered.

**Examples of Good Practice** – Many schools reported on their involvement with the national healthy schools programme as well as the development of parent workshops, healthy lunchbox sessions, growing their own food and school meal menu development

**Difficulties** – Many schools reported that although consistent messages around food were being given at school these were often undermined in the home environment.

“Our involvement with healthy eating is about to blossom into growing our own food and we now have an eco-club!”

“We set up a parent/school council committee to change lunch menus to healthier choices for children”

“Students are aware of the issues but we need further interaction with parents regarding healthy diets at home”

## Recommendations ▶▶

Overall Birmingham had above average results for most areas of school food. Some areas of note include:

Key Stage 2 Fruit is an area for additional work. We would like to see all school providing fruit and vegetables for pupils at KS2 either through healthy snacking policies, through fruit tuckshops or by purchasing additional fruit from the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme distributor.

Dining room environments was a particular issue for secondary schools. We would recommend looking at the school food trust resource – ‘A fresh look at the school meal experience’ for advice on support in this area. The report looks at how schools can make improvements to the look and feel of their dining hall, manage lunch times effectively, reduce queuing and to improve behaviour. The report is available at [www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk)

Cooking and Growing Clubs – Birmingham has a lower than average number of schools providing cooking and growing clubs for children. This year the School Food Trust has been awarded funding to develop ‘Lets Get Cooking’ Programmes in primary schools. For more information visit [www.letsgetcooking.org.uk](http://www.letsgetcooking.org.uk)

2007 is the Year of Farming and Food. The aim of the year is to engage pupils in an understanding of where food comes from – field to fork and a key objective is to ensure that all children participate in a growing activity. Many programmes are in place to support this. Visit [www.yearoffarmingandfood.org.uk](http://www.yearoffarmingandfood.org.uk) for more information.

### Useful websites

[www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk)  
[www.foodinschools.org.uk](http://www.foodinschools.org.uk)  
[www.healthyschools.org.uk](http://www.healthyschools.org.uk)  
[www.5aday.nhs.uk](http://www.5aday.nhs.uk)  
[www.letsgetcooking.org.uk](http://www.letsgetcooking.org.uk)  
[www.foodafactoflife.org.uk](http://www.foodafactoflife.org.uk)



Catherine Goodridge  
Regional School Food and Health Co-ordinator (West Midlands)

3rd Floor, Kingston House  
438 High Street  
West Bromwich  
B70 9LD

Tel: 0121 612 1460  
Fax: 0121 500 1501  
E-mail: [catherine.goodridge@sandwell-pct.nhs.uk](mailto:catherine.goodridge@sandwell-pct.nhs.uk)

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