

Eat for Free: Benefits and Impact

In Newham, over 90% of KS2 pupils have a school meal, significantly higher than in boroughs without universal meal schemes. Before the scheme was launched in 2009 only 49% of children were eating a school meal each day. Despite 52% of Newham children living in poverty, only 33% qualify for benefits related free school meals (FSM). Eat for Free (EFF) helps more children to access nutritious meals each day, with grant conditions and principles in place to ensure that we also target the a wider range of impacts and benefits.

What are the benefits of EFF to our community?

1. HEALTH AND WELLBEING



On the curriculum

Universal meals normalise healthy eating as a core part of the school day.



Less packed lunches

Only 1.6% of packed lunches meet the government's school meals nutritional standards.



Higher quality meals

All caterers who serve food as part of EFF, should also hold the Food For Life Served Here award.



Whole school approach

EFF grant principles have all schools working to develop a whole school approach to food.

2. EDUCATION



Disadvantaged pupils

EFF captures pupils who are living in low income households, who would otherwise miss out on a FSM. Universal has been shown to raise take up both as a whole and amongst those with FSM eligibility.



Concentration

Teachers have reported that a universal offer improves classroom behaviour and concentration, allowing for more teaching and less classroom management. Studies show that disruptive behaviour negatively affects teachers' well-being. Eating together benefits everyone in the classroom, whether they would have eaten a meal or not.



Performance & attainment

Hungry children can't learn. Recent data shows that the primary attainment score for disadvantaged pupils in boroughs with universal meals is higher compared to boroughs without a scheme.



More time

Time spent preparing packed lunches can be better spent with children (e.g. supporting activities such as homework and reading).

3. COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING



Local jobs

86% of employees working to deliver school meals are Newham residents. More meals eaten means more meals that need to be prepared creating rewarding skilled local jobs. Primary school kitchens employ around 500 workers in Newham.



Benefits to Newham workers

Eat for Free schools are required to pay London Living Wage and local government pensions. Certified meal standards as a grant condition means more cooking in each school which increases the volume and skill of work required locally.



Benefits to the Newham economy

Since the 1980s the school meals landscape has seen a significant decrease both in the number and size of local authority run education catering services. Large private sector caterers have grown with their remote national supply chains replacing more localised partnerships.

LA run school kitchens recognise unions and pay better than minimum Ts & Cs. EFF grant conditions seek to create a level playing field on labour costs when a school goes out to tender meaning caterers are competing on the quality of their meals and understanding of school's needs.

In Newham the Council owned caterer, Juniper Ventures, feeds the pupils in around two-thirds of all Eat for Free schools. The service uses local suppliers creating jobs accessible to residents.

4. SUSTAINABILITY



Climate Now

One of the six key futures outlined in Newham's Just Transition Plan is "We Eat Well and Sustainably." Grant conditions and principles have all 66 schools signed up as partners on this journey.



Food for Life Served Here

The scheme ensures all menus are inspected and accredited not just for health but against a standard that also prioritises the use of fresh, ethical and sustainable produce whilst championing local producers.



London Circular Purchasing Commitment

Newham Council was a founding signatory on this commitment that sets a measured pathway to reduce per plate CO2e an food waste and increase local buying. Grant conditions require all caterers to baseline and then commit to this journey to 2030.



Anchored spend

The Council invest around £6m every year in funding the KS2 element of the scheme but this enables all money spent on primary school meals in the borough to be anchored by EFF conditions and principles.

What's next?

There are 66 schools who participate in the Eat for Free programme, by continuing to evolve the conditions of grant and support on offer we are able to increase outputs that advance our position on children's health, education, climate and community wealth building.