

Libby Lewis

Farley Hill Primary School

“ We believe that things will get better and better through our involvement with the Food for Life Partnership. ”



My name is Libby Lewis. I am the cook/catering manager at Farley Hill Primary School, a small school of 210 pupils set in a beautiful rural location in Berkshire, just south of Reading.

Historically, meals were provided by contract catering companies, preparing food at off-site locations and transporting it in. This arrangement resulted in poor quality food, insufficient portion sizes, often delivered cold and a poor uptake of meals. About four and a half years ago, the headteacher, Lynn Marshall, in conjunction with the school governors, set up a committee to investigate bringing the catering back in house to improve the standard.

At the time I was working at the school as a classroom assistant and, as I had previous catering experience with the Metropolitan Police, I was invited to be part of the committee. After reviewing the existing facilities, numerous meetings and juggling the figures, it was decided to go in-house and I was offered the opportunity to take on the role of Catering Manager. Jane Kirk stayed on from the incumbent catering company and I recruited Clare Paul, both of whom have been invaluable in ensuring the success of the venture.

From the outset, we wanted, where possible, to source local produce and use organic ingredients and prepare the majority of the meals from scratch. We were lucky that a local organic butcher was supportive and a local farm shop, ran by a parent, supplied some of the vegetables. We

worked in conjunction with nutritionist at Wokingham Borough Council to create our own cycle of menus, with the intention of mixing favourites with slightly more adventurous meals (an initiative that has mixed success!).

To achieve those aims, we would need a much improved kitchen. The lack of available examples in our borough and the restriction on available funds meant that we had to design and project manage the build ourselves, with help from the parents and governors. The kitchen was built over 3 weeks and was completed at Easter 2005. We redecorated the dining room, promoted a competition within the school to give the room a name (Eat Smart Café) and organised a grand opening attended by Michael Coaker from the Adopt a Chef scheme (who still comes to school twice a year to work with the children) and by local TV!

The take up of meals increased considerably (currently running at 66%) and we started to establish more food related activities into the school. Cookery classes were introduced to the curriculum, four years of Christmas lunches have been very successful and we have started to prepare food for the school activities such as the community firework display, Summer Fete and Christmas Bazaar. We provide breakfasts during SATs and have recently launched themed lessons for parents and children working together, making fun food.

Outside of the kitchen we have built a relationship with the local farming estate to organise trips for the children so that they can see where the food comes from and how it is grown. We participate in the 'Scores on the Doors' scheme in Wokingham which means that you can see the results of the last food hygiene inspection of food businesses expressed as a star rating and have welcomed other schools who are considering doing the same to share our experiences.

We have just had our new intake in the reception class. I had the opportunity to speak at length to the new parents, explaining what we are aiming to do and how we will be able to provide the children with the best quality ingredients and nutritionally balanced lunch. They were especially interested in our involvement with the Food for Life Partnership. As a result, I have had the largest uptake of school meals from any class since we started the kitchen. On some days, we have had over 90% of those children eating our lunches.

We are absolutely delighted by this and hope that this is repeated as new pupils join the school. We believe that things will get better and better through our involvement with the Food for Life Partnership.