

Nicky Ibertson

Cowes

Primary School

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I started working at Cowes Primary school in 2007 when our headteacher decided to bring the catering in-house. I have worked in catering all my life but never worked in a school kitchen before. It was quite a challenge in the beginning, especially as the previous cook who was going to be my assistant decided to leave too! The previous catering company had taken most of the smaller pieces of equipment leaving me with just some very old ovens, a fridge and a dishwasher. In the summer holidays my job was to decide what equipment would be needed and order it.

The next challenge that was ahead of me was to devise a 6 week menu following the guide lines for school lunches. By now a new assistant had been employed and between us we decided on our first menu and set about finding our suppliers. At the beginning of September we had a couple of development days and these were our trial runs, feeding the staff at lunchtime. The first 'real' menu was lamb burgers in pitta bread with Vegetable sticks and salad or spaghetti Primavera followed by banana malt loaf. I was so nervous as we set about preparing the lunch and at 12pm everything was ready to go and the shutters went up. When I had taken the job I hadn't really thought about the fact that I would have to serve the children and I was very worried about that part but I love it now and having a chat with them as they come up for their dinner is the highlight of the day. Some of them are so funny with the things they say... we do have some characters!

Within the first few months we were approached by Nula Grandcourt

a parent of a child in another local school. She campaigned to get local produce used in schools and we became part of a local pilot scheme. We were given 20p per plate to use as much local produce as we could. I soon discovered just how lucky we are here on the Isle of Wight and found we had so much local produce to choose from. We started using local flour, eggs, milk, lamb, pork, beef, salad leaves, and tomatoes. Lots of vegetables are grown here on the island and we are famous for our garlic and mingella ice cream. We started inviting the parents in for lunch so they could taste the dinners for themselves and the numbers increased from 70 – 80 dinners per day in 2007 to 80 – 90 in 2008 (The total number in school is 270).

Our head teacher then put us forward to become a flagship school for the Food for Life Partnership. I don't think any of us realised just what this would involve when she put our name forward!

Being involved with the Partnership has made my job far more interesting and challenging. Every day is different for me. I get to work for about 7:45 am and the first job of the day is making the bread using our local organic flour. Then I press ahead with making the soup of the day and the rest of the main meal until my assistant Lisa comes in at 9:30am. She gets on with the pudding and baguettes or jacket potatoes that have been ordered and at 11:30 our 3rd member of staff, Wendy comes in to start her shift washing up. At 11:45am the reception children start to come up for lunch followed by the rest of the school at 12pm and 12:30pm. Service is usually



finished at 1pm and then there is the task of clearing up, paperwork and orders for the next day. On Tuesdays and Fridays we provide lunch over at the pre-school to the rising 4's. This has helped them get used to trying different foods and most of them will try things.

I am quite shocked sometimes at the lack of knowledge about food and where it has come from some of these children have and their aversion to try something new. Recently on a roast dinner day I was so fed up of the children always saying they didn't want cabbage that I told them all it was national cabbage eating day and they all had to try some. At the end of service three of them came up to the counter and said they had actually liked it!

Our numbers are still increasing and now our average is about 120 per day out of a school of 270 pupils. We are always trying to think of new ideas to try and encourage more children to have school dinners instead of packed lunch but it's not easy. We have done so many things, from farmers markets with our local suppliers, to chutney making using produce from the school garden.

We have recently got our Bronze award and are on our way to Silver. I love my work at Cowes Primary school as each day brings something new and being part of the Food for Life Partnership is helping us to help educate our children about their food and how it gets onto their plate.

Isle of Wight