Stewart Smith

Oreston
Community
Primary School

I would say to anyone thinking of joining the Food for Life Partnership that whilst it may seem a little daunting at first, once you get organised and chip away at it and get the ball rolling it's easy to continue as it creates a momentum of its own. Don't be put off by a little change!

'm Stewart the kitchen manager at Oreston Community Primary School in Plymouth. There are 316 children here and I cater for between 90-120 of them most days, (give or take a few) more on roast and chip day obviously!

I absolutely love to cook, I'm happy to cook all day and as you'll see most days I do just that. My parents got me into cooking, my dad used to mess about in the kitchen taking hours to make his version of Welsh Rarebit and my mum trained as a chef and is now a catering manager and she used to drag me into work with her. I trained as a chef back in my home town of Leicester and before I left I worked for Duchy Catering as an Area Training and Support manager were I managed 14 busy sites ranging from public and private schools to office blocks and busy factory warehouses. I've got to be honest I got very bored of 70 odd hours per week of thankless tasks and thought there's got to be more than this.

My wife and I moved to Plymouth two years back to buy a small Bed & Breakfast, to have a better quality of life and watch our children grow up. I chose to get back into catering as I had a little spare time and the hours of term time really appealed to me and fitted well into my lifestyle.

I started at Oreston in April 2009 after a new kitchen was installed by Plymouth City Council in September 2008. This enabled the service for the children to move from a transported in meal to a fantastic, modern, efficient kitchen that produces good quality food and provides a valuable service. Right from the early stages the headteacher Mark Ackers wanted a training kitchen to get the kids into the kitchen and also to get the chefs into the classrooms.



We at Oreston are quite new to the Food for Life Partnership as we joined early 2009 but have already become one of the two flagship schools in the City. We are on the verge of the Bronze award at the moment and we as a team are striving for the Silver then the Gold award as soon as physically possible. We first got involved because we believe that our school food culture needed to be better and children could learn more about food whilst enjoying the entire process and having fun. Food needs to be more entwined with the curriculum. I would say to anyone thinking of joining the Food for Life Partnership that whilst it may seem a little daunting at first, once you get organised and chip away at it and get the ball rolling it's easy to continue as it creates a momentum of its own. Don't be put off by a little change!

I also run a Cookery Club at Oreston which is part of the 'Let's Get Cooking' national programme. I run it twice a week in one hour sessions and have 18 children each class with a waiting list of 40 or so, bless em! Mark the headteacher at the school thought it might be fun to get the children to call me 'Chef', like Gordon Ramsey gets everyone to say 'Yes chef' and it's been an ongoing thing for the children since. The children at Oreston were also involved in naming the kitchen 'The Orestaurant' (get it!) and this is all part of a deliberate attempt to re-brand the service... complete with child waiters in the near future. A favourite of the Cookery Club is the crunch crumble and because I give out recipes at the end of each session I've had so many parents come back after making it at home with really positive comments.

I have a great relationship within the school and I believe this is crucial to success, that and communication. I have regular meetings with the head Mark and daily chats when he picks up his lunch. I also attend the School Council meetings and we are currently setting up a 'Food Critics Group' which will meet once a term to discuss all things food. I know I'm doing my bit for these 316 kids by informing, educating and providing great food and knowledge, and I feel so encouraged when just one of the children runs back up to the hot plate after having a school dinner to say 'that was the bestest meal ever Stewart!'.

Devon