

Babs Askham

St Wilfrid's Catholic High School and 6th form college

My name is Babs Askham and I am the Catering Manager at St Wilfrid's Catholic High School. St Wilfrid's is a secondary school with 1800 students from 11 to 18 years old. I have worked at St Wilfrid's for five years, of which two and a half was with the local authority. This was okay, but that was the problem it was only okay!

Local authorities were benefiting and I had to do my best with the quality of food that suppliers gave me. The child's health wasn't really a key factor.

When the contract with the authority ended we decided as a school to go it alone which was very exciting for me. The first thing we did was set up a supplier day to look at some local suppliers in our area. The day was a success and by September we were all set to go it alone! My line manager then approached me and asked if I was interested in applying to be a Flagship school for the Food for Life Partnership. I researched more about what this entailed and was excited again, we were going to improve our menus even more by looking at Farm Assured meats and organic products.

We applied and we are now a flagship school. We have received Bronze and Silver and are now working towards Gold.

One of the things we did when we joined the Food for Life Partnership was start a SNAG. We had students, staff, governors and myself in this group and one of the first things we discussed was the dining hall. We sent out a survey to all the students to ask what they thought of queues, seating, decor, atmosphere and the food in the dining hall.

The results were put on to a graph and showed we needed to take a look at seating, queues and decor. We had 1800 students in school and we had 220 seats in the dining room, it was obvious we needed more seating. The plans were drawn up for a new dining room, myself and students were involved in this and I was also involved in choosing the colour scheme and this was all to take place in the summer break of 2009.

Two weeks before the summer break the builders were in and the work started. I was calling into work throughout the summer to see how things were going, I thought they would never be finished but they did and on time too! We had a brand new dining hall and a new service counter.

We now had the seating; we just had to get the students through as fast as we could, as they only have 35 minutes for their lunch. We then looked at the bio metric system which allows students to put money onto their account through the internet or by payment machines around school. Students now come along for their lunch, choose what they are having and put their finger on a scanner and the money is deducted from the account through a till system. Each student is supposed to take 20 seconds to process and this means that the queues should go down faster.

We now have the bio metric system and the students seem to be going through faster and we have had an uptake of meals, this could be because queue's and seating has improved or simply the environment. Parents can also look on the internet and see what their child is eating and drinking each day.



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