

**Barnardo's Response to
Turning the Tables:
Transforming School Food –
Recommendations for the Development of
Revised School Lunch Standards**

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Introduction

Barnardo's is the UK's leading children's charity. We work directly with more than 100,000 children, young people and their families in 361 services across the UK. In addition, we support indirectly a further 40,000 through our work with community groups and other organisations. We work with the most vulnerable children and young people helping them to overcome the challenges facing them and to fulfil their potential.

We welcome this consultation and our response is based on our experience of working with families on issues related to food poverty and also on the findings in our report 'Burger boy and sporty girl' children and young people's attitudes towards food in schools (2004) a copy of which is enclosed.

Our specific response to the consultation questions is as follows:

The standards

We welcome **recommendations 1 and 2**: Barnardo's has been campaigning for the introduction of nutrient-based standards and therefore we are extremely pleased that the new standards are based on the Caroline Walker Trust Guidelines.

Recommendation 3: we support this recommendation but we are of the view that timescales should be set for schools to meet this target and that where schools do not have kitchen facilities they receive additional funding to rectify this.

Recommendation 4: research for Barnardo's report 'Burger boy and sporty girl' included nursery schools. An analysis of the nutritional content in one of the nursery schools in a deprived area showed that not all of the Caroline Trust Walker Trust Standards were met. Although the CWT guidelines for carbohydrates, fibre, protein and in terms of micronutrients, average values for iron, calcium and foliate were met, the total fat, saturated fat and sugar levels exceeded the maximum recommended level. The average sodium content was half the daily recommended maximum for this age group.

We agree with the comment in the consultation document that children in pre-school settings should also be protected and would strongly urge that all early years settings are required to meet the new standards and that a reasonable early timescale is set for this.

We also agree that the Government needs to set as a priority standards for other food and drink service provision, including break-time snacks, breakfast and after-school

clubs. As part of the extended schools programme children will be spending more time in schools and consuming a large part of their daily food intake on school premises. It is crucial that all food consumed on school premises meets the new nutritional standards. Furthermore, children and young people need to receive consistent messages as part of a healthy schools approach. Having different standards for meals other than lunches gives inconsistent and conflicting messages. One of the five outcomes as part of the 'Every child matters' change agenda is 'being healthy' – all food consumed on school premises needs to contribute to this outcome.

Recommendation 5: we welcome this recommendation. We would also recommend that advertising of unhealthy foods is banned from school premises, including tuck shops.

Recommendations 6-10: we endorse these recommendations. In relation to recommendation 9 we would urge that the findings of Ofsted inspections are made public, are analysed to ascertain if there are any specific trends and that Government takes action on these before the suggested review in 2011.

Additional comments - we would recommend that all schools have an access to a qualified nutritionist who can analyse school meals and packed lunches for nutritional content against the CWT guidelines and work with schools in achieving improvements. The basis for this recommendation arises from the research for Barnardo's report 'Burger boy and sporty girl'. At least three of the schools made changes to their practice when they were presented with our findings. In one of the primary schools, children were not eating adequate amounts of vegetables or a salad as they could help themselves to these. The school had not realised this but once they were made aware, they changed their practice and subsequently won a 'Pride of Britain' award for improving school meals. A nursery school is still working with the nutritionist and one of the secondary schools has persuaded the Head teacher to take action on the basis of our research.

A pot of funding needs to be set aside, perhaps as part of the work that the Schools Food Trust will undertake, so that all schools can pay for the services of a qualified nutritionist – this will also encourage schools to start meeting the new guidelines before the target dates. In our experience big gains can be made through small changes to practice – but schools need professional advice and support.

Delivering Change

Catering

Recommendations 11 and 12: we support these recommendations but would strongly urge that all it should be mandatory to accredit all training and not merely left to caterers and schools 'to consider' as paragraph 3.8. sets out.

Schools

Recommendation 13: we support this recommendation.

Recommendation 14: Barnardo's would endorse this recommendation. In addition, it is important that children and young people's attitudes about health and obesity are discussed as part of the curriculum. Our research found that:

- Children and young people have very strongly developed ideas about health and obesity which are based on gender and income-related stereotypes often portrayed in the media
- These stereotypes have a strong influence on children's food choices as they do not want to differ from their peers

If children and young people are to be encouraged to make healthy food choices while at school, and if successful this should influence choices when they are not at school, then issues such as peer pressure, brands and the influence of advertising need to be discussed with pupils.

Teaching food preparation should be culturally sensitive and meet the ethnic diversity of the pupils.

Recommendation 15: we agree with this recommendation

Recommendation 16: Barnardo's would support the proposal that schools need to work with pupils and parents on **packed lunches**. Barnardo's research showed that the content of packed lunches is dictated by rigid rules enforced through subtle peer pressure, resulting in lunchboxes that are high in fat, salt and sugar. Pupils in primary schools were more likely than secondary school pupils to bring a packed lunch as it gave them control and choice. Although the primary schools in our research stated that chocolate was banned, this was seldom enforced. Schools need to come up with a strategy on packed lunch boxes as part of the healthy school approach. The Food Standards Agency's guidance should be made available to parents/carers by schools. We would recommend that Ofsted inspections also look at packed lunches.

Where schools set down their own guidelines for specific foods that are not allowed in packed lunch boxes then these rules need to be enforced and again should be included in the Ofsted inspection.

Getting started

Recommendations 17-20: Barnardo's endorses these recommendations and has no specific comment to make, other than that schools should be encouraged to start making immediate progress and to implement the new standards as early as they can.

Financial Investment

Recommendation 21: Barnardo's research found that cost was an influential factor when young people made lunch choices at school. In one of the secondary schools a healthy two-course meal was double the cost of fast food. We share the concerns of the Panel that low income families may be adversely affected by price increases. This would impact on take-up with children and young people from poorer families opting for a packed lunch or in the case of secondary schools going out at lunchtime to purchase fast food.

For poorer children a school lunch is often the main meal of the day and it is vital that all children benefit from improved school lunches. There is a strong link between obesity and low income: the recommendations from the Panel have the potential to start to reverse this trend: but the issue of cost must be addressed. We would strongly recommend that all schools are required to set the costs of school lunches at level enables all children, including those on free school meals, to get a healthy two course lunch.

Barnardo's feels that although the Government is making substantial investment this is inadequate. The Scottish Executive is spending three times as much as part of its strategy to improve school meals. Government must avoid passing on the extra costs of improving school meals to parents /carers and pupils.

The value of the entitlement of free school meals also needs to be increased so that poorer children do not miss out. Furthermore, all food available throughout the school day must be affordable.

Recommendations 22-30: we agree with these recommendations.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Recommendations 31-35: Barnardo's agrees with these recommendations but would add two points:

- The views of children, young people should be ascertained
- Monitoring should also extend to packed lunches and also ascertain how much children, in the case of case secondary schools, are leaving school premises to purchase fast food locally

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