

Pendeen School

Food and Eating – Criterion 6

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Healthy School Revalidation 2004

Pendeen School is a rural primary school set in a village between St Ives and St Just. The school has approximately 130 children and is in an area of high rural deprivation. Sarah Phillips is the healthy schools co-ordinator tells us about the process.

Identification of need

In September 2003 several new initiatives were introduced with the aim of raising pupil achievement. Two of these involved altering the timetable and teaching for pupils:

- The two key stage classes were streamed, by ability, for literacy and numeracy lessons.
- The timetable for all classes was changed to allow for 3 sessions during the morning rather than 2 as before. This three part morning allowed for literacy and numeracy to be taught during sessions 1 and 2. The key stage 2 classes now spend the third session and the afternoon as an age based class with their class teacher.

As the healthy schools co-ordinator I was also aware that research shows that food, water and rest all impact on pupil learning and achievement. I was keen to implement changes to the food and drinking habits of our children, linked to our new initiatives and pupil achievement.

- The three part morning gave time for two breaks during the morning. It was therefore proposed that the first break be designated as a “fruit break”. The children could remain in their classrooms and have fruit or a cereal bar and a drink of water.
- It was suggested that the second break be kept for outdoor play. The pupils would be able to use all of the time for play and exercise rather than having to use some of it to eat their tuck.

- The breakfast club had been running during SATs week for a few years. It made sense to run this throughout the year. We also proposed running an early morning exercise club. Both of these would run from 8:15 – 8:45 am each day.

Implementation of change

In September the initiatives started up and met with varying degrees of verbal approval. Feedback from pupils and parents centred mainly on fruit break as crisps and chocolate biscuits were no longer acceptable. After a vocal fortnight the more negative comments ceased and fruit break became the norm.

Any change seems to bring with it an unsettled period of adjustment. As a school we believed in the changes, presented a united front and stood firm in our beliefs, promoting the positive message and answering any questions that parents and pupils had.

Outcomes for the school and young people.

In April 2004 we sent out pupil questionnaires to measure the impact of the initiatives. The initial set up difficulties had been resolved and the initial uncertainty associated with any change had gone. After two terms we believed that the pupils could genuinely reflect on how the initiatives were working (or not working) for them.

The questionnaires were given out to pupils in classes 2, 3 and 4. Class 1 was not included because the pupils did not know how the morning had been organised in the previous year and could not, realistically, make comparisons. Some of the questionnaires were completed at school and others were completed at home. Fifty seven questionnaires were returned.

The survey did not include questions about the exercise club as this folded. The breakfast club was far more popular in the morning. (Further comments about the exercise club are included in the Conclusion.)

Breakfast Club

Although only 42% of children attend the breakfast club the majority (88%) of the responses were positive about it. Pupil comments fell into three areas: healthy eating, working parents and friendship.

Healthy eating comments included:

“Helps children, gives them energy.”

“It provides children with a ‘substantial healthy meal’”

“It’s a healthy start to the day.”

“Wakes you up and helps learning.”

Working parents comments included:

“If a child’s parents have to go to work without having to give their child breakfast, they can have it at school.”

“It saves a lot of time if you are in a rush.”

“If they don’t have breakfast in the morning they can go.”

One pupil also thought that breakfast club helps people’s manners “to say please and thank you.”

This comment seemed to sum it all up “Because you get to talk to your friends and you get more energy for lessons (cheap).”

Fruit Break

81% of pupils usually have fruit break and of these 51% have fruit, 33% have a cereal bar and 11% have something else (possibly misinterpreted the question and answered this for dried fruit or carrot sticks).

95% of surveyed pupils made positive comments about fruit break. Most pupils linked fruit break to healthy eating. This was encouraging as healthy eating was one of the targets on our Healthy Schools action plan.

Healthy eating comments included:

“I think it helps because it’s healthier than eating crisps and chocolate.”

“It helps people to keep healthy.”

“Healthy snacks are good for you.”

Healthy eating and learning comments:

Some pupils made the links between diet, energy levels, concentrating and learning.

“It helps us to think and listen more.”

“Helps them to concentrate in class.”

“It gets your brain going.”

Timetable changes and streaming

Pupils have a more evenly split perspective on the timetable changes introduced in September. 60% are in favour of streaming. 37% were not in favour. However, 72% of the pupils made positive comments about streaming.

Comments included:

“It helps people work better.”

“By learning different things.”

“Helps people’s SATs papers and it builds their confidence.”

“Because people get split from their friends so they can’t talk to each other.”

Some pupils related streaming to the experience of Key stage 3. “I think it helps because when you go up to secondary school they have different lessons and it helps individual people learn.”

Playtime

Responses here were all positive except for one, which had a positive and negative comment “Play with my friends or not have anything to do.”

Views on the three part session and impact on learning

82% of pupils view the three part morning positively, with 68% making positive comments about it. 70% made a positive comment about the impact of the three part morning. Pupils seemed to find it difficult to articulate why they view the three part morning positively.

“I like having the shorter sessions in the morning and learning different things in each.”

“I enjoy it more.”

“It has made me keener to learn because the morning doesn’t drag.”

“I find it is fun having two breaks.”

“It breaks the morning up.”

Conclusions

All aspects covered in the survey had more positive responses and comments than negative ones. After two terms the different initiatives to support healthy eating are working well and pupils appear to understand how breakfast club and fruit break impact on their diet and, more importantly, how diet impacts on learning.

The majority of pupils view the changes positively. In fact, the breakfast club has been so successful that the exercise club folded because Pendeen pupils prefer breakfast to exercising. Arguably, if pupils do not have breakfast at home, then food at breakfast club is a more important start to the day than exercise.

The exercise club stopped running and the school has been increasing opportunities for the children to exercise at different times of the day. All pupils now have the opportunity to go swimming with the school on a rolling programme. In addition to the Key stage 2 games afternoon we now run a Key stage 1 games afternoon where tennis, towerball, football, hockey, bikes and scooters are on offer to the children. The number and range of equipment for Huff ‘n Puff at lunchtime has been increased. The school has had fun fit training and some aspects of this have already been taken on board.

Although only 60% of pupils are in favour of streaming, 72% of pupils responses were positive about how streaming can help pupils.

The majority of pupils like the three part morning. The comments suggest that pupils like the breaks between sessions they feel they have gained something and that they can concentrate better.