

Better nursery food now

What we need and why we need it



Organix



Soil Association



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1. The campaign

This document introduces the Soil Association's 'Better nursery food now' campaign, which is partly funded by Organix. The document summarises the findings of our 2008 report, reviews the current situation, introduces the results of our recent survey of 1000 parents of nursery children, and sets our campaign aims

Young children are especially vulnerable to the effects of poor diet and nutrition. Almost one in four children are overweight or obese by the time they start school,² meaning they are more likely to develop serious health problems later in life. In 2008 the Soil Association and Organix produced *Georgie Porgie Pudding and Pie: Exposing the truth about nursery food*,³ which for the first time examined the state of food served in nurseries and children's centres in England and Wales. It found widespread variability in the quality of food given to children in early years settings, with foods that are now banned or restricted in schools still regularly served to under-fives and colourings and additives that would not be allowed in manufactured foods for young children still on offer in nurseries. The report also found that nursery food was largely unregulated; the only legally enforceable rule that existed didn't apply to the nine out of ten nurseries that weren't state-maintained. At the beginning of 2010, we find that very little has changed.

We think this is unacceptable and we are asking for better nursery food now. From the government, we want:

- ▶ **Clear rules** for the food served to children in all early years settings.
- ▶ **Real inspection** to make sure nurseries stick to these rules.
- ▶ **Training** in early years nutrition for nursery cooks and catering staff.
- ▶ **Accountability** from one government body for the state of nursery food.

For a more complete picture of nursery food in England and Wales, please refer to the report on which this campaign is based, *Georgie Porgie Pudding and Pie: Exposing the truth about nursery food*¹

We also want to help nurseries serve food that is better for the environment and local economy as well as for children's health, and recommend a 'whole community' approach to mealtimes that involves cooks and care staff, children and their families, and local farmers and food producers in the everyday planning, growing, cooking and serving of food.

1.1 What we need

All the good practice that does exist throughout the UK shows just how good nursery food can be when dedicated nursery staff and parents make food a top priority. Yet few nurseries receive adequate support to do likewise, so the quality of nursery food across the country is highly variable. Any good work that does exist happens despite of, rather than because of the policy backdrop. Indeed, nurseries are operating in a policy vacuum from Governments in England and Wales, with some better progress seen in Scotland. The following are based on the recommendations for action from the *Georgie, Porgie Pudding and Pie* report, for Government and nurseries to address these issues.

From the UK government, we want:

▶ Regulation

Mandatory standards for the quality of food served in all nurseries (not just the state maintained minority). These should be based on the Caroline Walker Trust standards detailed in their report,

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Eating Well for Under-Fives, and the same foods currently not permitted in schools should not be permitted in nurseries [although we would defer to the decisions of the School Food Trust's expert group regarding whether these standards should be food-group or nutrient based]. CWT nutritional standards for older children form the basis for the food standards already in place in primary and secondary schools.

► Inspection

Rigorous criteria for Ofsted (or Estyn in Wales) to inspect the quality of the food on offer in nurseries, as well as the extent to which the children are encouraged to learn about food and good food habits. Inspectors should be required to inspect the food for its nutritional qualities, as well as taste and appearance. They should ideally share a mealtime with the children to assess the nursery's 'whole school' approach to food and dining, and should receive basic training in food and nutrition to enable them to recognise healthy menus.

► Training

Funding to train nursery staff in nutrition and key cookery skills. Without training, nursery staff are unlikely to have the skills or knowledge needed to improve nursery food in line with the new nutritional standards. The Department of Business, Innovation and Skills should commission the development of a nationally accredited qualification for nursery catering staff, with funding from the Skills Funding Agency⁴ and working with sector skills council for

hospitality People 1st and the Children's Workforce Development Council, covering early years nutrition, food preparation and menu planning. All nursery managers and nursery cooks should be required to undertake training in basic nutrition for under-fives, with care staff undertaking training to help promote healthy food to children. This could be introduced as an additional module in existing compulsory childcare qualifications and/or developed as a one-day accredited course.⁵

► Accountability

We ask the Department for Children, Schools and Families (in both Westminster and the Welsh Assembly) to take responsibility for nursery food. Within that department, the responsibility in England should sit with the School Food Trust, and in Wales with the Appetite for Life team. They would be responsible for improving nursery school food, and be obliged to be publicly accountable and report regularly on progress. There are some encouraging signs that in England this is happening. We strongly recommend in the light of the upcoming election that the new government ensure a single department retains responsibility for the quality of food served to young children in all nurseries.

We also recommend that the government consider a 'whole supply chain' approach to food quality in nurseries, and set standards that would take into account the way the food was grown or produced. The Food for Life Catering Mark 'gold' targets of 75% unprocessed food, 50% locally sourced and



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30% organic⁶ build on the CWT nutritional standards and would ensure that high quality food would be available to children in all nurseries, while helping to support local communities and to meet the government's climate change targets.⁷

1.2 Why we need it

The younger the child, the more vulnerable their health is to the effects of poor quality nutrition. Children's eating habits are formed at this young age so the choices, tastes and nutritional quality of the food they eat have a far reaching impact on their food preferences and health later in life. Early in 2008, the Government Cabinet Office's Strategy Unit said⁸ that "existing patterns of food consumption will result in our society being loaded with a heavy burden of obesity and diet-related ill health" and that "ill health is already costing the NHS £10 billion per annum".⁹ In addition, food and farming is responsible for around one-third of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions,¹⁰ and the government has legally binding targets to reduce the UK's emissions by at least one-third by 2020.¹¹ Against this background, it is hard to underestimate the public health significance of the food provided for children in nurseries and the responsibility to the environment of any institution buying and serving food.

A ground-breaking Government-funded Foresight obesity report published in autumn 2007 identified "eleven critical opportunities for intervention to

prevent obesity later in life". The first three are breastfeeding/ bottlefeeding (zero to six months), weaning (six to 24 months) and pre-school age (two to five years). In other words, nearly a quarter of these opportunities to prevent obesity can occur when a child is at nursery.¹² The National Child Measurement Programme found in December 2009 that almost one in four children (22.8%) were already overweight or obese by reception year in primary school.¹³ Paradoxically, while many young children may be consuming too much energy and becoming overweight or obese, many children, whatever their energy intake, are also malnourished – i.e. they are not meeting their vitamin and mineral requirements. Early results from the most recent phase of the National Diet and Nutrition Survey of children aged between 1½ and 3 years, published in 2010 by the Department of Health, found that children's eating habits had improved little since 1995, when on average children ate too much added sugar, too much salt, and not enough iron, zinc, vitamin C or vitamin A.¹⁴

Meanwhile, nursery menu planners' inadequate nutritional knowledge has been blamed for an imbalance of nutrients in the food provided to children in nurseries. A 2009 review in Hampshire, conducted as part of a national survey of 1,000 nurseries by the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS),¹⁵ compared the food in ten nurseries to the Caroline Walker Trust standards for under-fives and found that none of them provided enough energy, and highlighted an excess of protein and a lack of zinc and oily fish. The paediatric

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dieticians conducting the review recommended nurseries provide training in early years' nutrition for their staff.¹⁶ Routine review of nursery food is essential to ensure nurseries fulfil their role in protecting children's health.

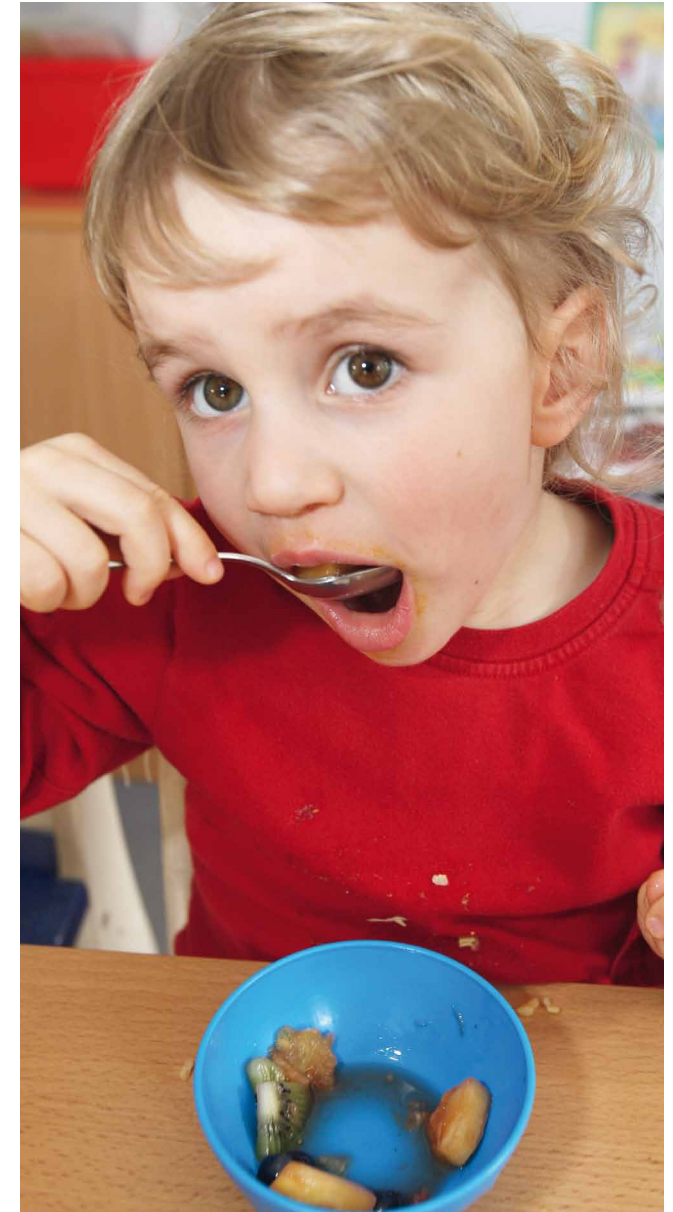
When buying food on behalf of children, it makes sense to consider that food's effects on the environment and changing climate and therefore to protect the health of the planet that children will inhabit as well as their own health. In Europe, over 30% of the greenhouse gases from consumer purchases come from the food and drink sector.¹⁷ A study on the 'food footprint' of Wales found that it could be reduced by one-third by increasing efficiency of supply chains, and changing diets to include more organic food and less meat.¹⁸ Nurseries can help. Emissions from agriculture can be significantly reduced if everyone, including nurseries:

- ▶ **Use more organic produce:** Organic farming is less energy intensive than industrial farming, particularly because it avoids the use of artificial fertilisers, which use lots of energy and water in their production, during which the powerful greenhouse gas nitrous oxide is also released.¹⁹ Growing more fruit, vegetables, salads and herbs themselves can also help nurseries teach children about food, and can encourage them to eat fruit and vegetables.
- ▶ **Buy more local and seasonal produce:** This can support local farmers, build a secure local food supply, keep more money in your local community, and reduce the energy used in food production,

transport and storage.²⁰ In addition, making stronger links with local farmers can provide opportunities for children to learn about where their food comes from.

- ▶ **Serve less meat:** Meat and dairy products are among the most energy-intensive and greenhouse-gas producing foods of all.²¹ Avoiding cheaper products from animals reared in intensive conditions, and buying less but better quality meat from free-range or organic British farms, can reduce your menu's contribution to climate change without challenging your budget.
- ▶ **Use less processed food:** To reduce packaging waste, and cook meals on site to control food waste more effectively.

The Department of Children, Schools and Families, with the School Food Trust, has done commendable work over the last five years in implementing the nutritional standards in primary and secondary schools, which has seen great improvement in the quality of food served. Evidence of the benefits of better school food is accumulating: advanced concentration and ability to learn, better social skills, improved physical health and increased wellbeing.²² While regulation has made positive changes to food and the dining experience for primary and secondary school children, however, nursery food has been left behind. The following two sections describe the real state of nursery food today.



1. The campaign

1.3 Case study: Buffer Bear

- ▶ Money spent per day per pupil: **Unknown**
- ▶ Organic ingredients: **No**
- ▶ Local ingredients: **No**
- ▶ Unnecessary processed food: **Yes**
- ▶ Parents given information on menu: **Yes**
- ▶ Parents involved in setting menus: **Not regularly**
- ▶ Comply with CWT guidelines: **No**
- ▶ Menu analysed by a nutritionist: **No**

Lucy is very concerned about what her son eats and has been trying to improve his nursery's food for a while. She has found that Buffer Bear nursery in Sutton, Surrey, part of a chain of 24 across England, will say they are improving but actually change very little. "It absolutely shocks me to hear what the children have eaten during the day. Chips, pre-prepared fishcakes and ice cream are regularly served up to the children." Lucy has also noticed that what is served rarely matches what is on the menu plan.

Lucy was in such regular contact with Buffer Bear about the food that they asked her to help them write new menus. "Although they did listen to my concerns and the menus have slightly improved, they still serve chips on a regular basis, along with... tinned ravioli, cheap sausages, sugary cereals for breakfast and arctic roll." Lucy also wanted to get the menus looked at by a nutritionist: "I know that

the menus have not been nutritionally analysed and they certainly don't meet the Caroline Walker Trust guidelines."

Lucy remains unhappy with the state of Buffer Bear's food, however, and says, "after discussions, the food gets much better for a week or two, then they slip back to their old ways. For example, I have been promised that the fishcakes would be replaced with whole fish pieces and that they would start serving oily fish, but neither has happened."

The nursery manager has agreed that Lucy's son will be given alternatives to things like chips and cheap sausages. However, Lucy is still unhappy: "I am just so disappointed that they do not take the matter seriously enough to remove these items from the menu for all children that attend the nursery."

Lucy believes that a lack of training for the nursery's staff creates this situation: "After explaining that I didn't want my son to have highly processed meat, I was surprised to be asked if it was because he was Muslim. I think the nursery staff do not fully understand the importance of eating a healthy, balanced diet." The campaign has heard from other parents with children at Buffer Bear nurseries that have had similar experiences with the food.

Perhaps she should move her son to a different nursery? Lucy explains, "I had great difficulty in finding a full time place for my son as the nurseries in my area are over-subscribed. It would be very hard and more costly for me to move him at this stage. He is very settled and happy where he is."

We asked Buffer Bear nurseries what they thought

of Lucy's experience. The chain's manager, Kay Turner, informed us that the cook at the Sutton branch has since retired. The only qualification Buffer Bear cooks were required to have was a Food Safety (hygiene) certificate, but some did have cookery qualifications. The nursery had tried to use menus that conformed to the CWT guidelines for under-fives but as these had not reflected what the children chose to eat, they had decided to use guidance provided by an NHS nutritionist instead. Kay didn't feel it was appropriate to share information on this guidance without the nutritionist's consent.

2. The truth about nursery food

"Commercial baby food production is tightly regulated, yet at nurseries the food provided may be determined by the education, budget and beliefs of the nursery owner"

Dr Kathryn Hart, University of Surrey, quoted in *Georgie Porgie Pudding and Pie: Exposing the truth about nursery food*

2.1 Georgie Porgie Pudding and Pie

When the report *Georgie Porgie Pudding and Pie: Exposing the truth about nursery food*²³ was published in 2008, more than 600,000 children attended day care in England and Wales.²⁴ The report found that the food and food culture in nurseries varied dramatically, as did the amount of money spent on ingredients. There was a lack of clear rules for nursery food and inadequate inspection of their food provision, despite the fact that there is (and was) detailed mandatory standards in place for the food available in primary and secondary schools and the baby food market is tightly regulated. Although nursery care workers are obliged to undertake childcare qualifications, nursery cooks and catering staff are not required to undertake training in nutrition or cookery.

In summary, when considering food served in nurseries in England and Wales at the time of the report, this was the situation:

- ▶ **No compulsory training for staff.**
- ▶ **No clear nutritional standards.**
- ▶ **No agency to monitor the quality of food provided.**
- ▶ **No Government department giving a lead or promoting good practice.**
- ▶ **No Government funding available to help nurseries improve provision.**



2. The truth about nursery food

Food quality and ingredient spend

The Daycare Trust estimates that on average a full-time nursery place for a child under the age of two years was £8,000 a year in 2008, or £32 a day, assuming a five day week (rising to around £40 a day in London).²⁵ There is no published data on the average spend on ingredients for food in nursery schools in England and Wales but according to nursery staff surveyed for the report, the amount of money spent on children's food is sometimes pitifully low, with some nurseries spending as little as 25p per child on ingredients.²⁶

The majority, however, reported that they spent around £1 per child per day on food, and nurseries featured in *Georgie Porgie* showed that it is possible to feed children good quality, nutritious food for as little as 80p a day. The research team found commendable examples of high quality, freshly prepared, locally sourced and sometimes organic food in all sectors of nursery provision (private, voluntary and state-maintained).

Unfortunately the team also found many situations where nurseries are serving children ready-made and processed food such as chips and economy burgers that would not be allowed in schools. It found that colourings and additives not permitted under EU law in manufactured foods for young children (under three years) were regularly served in nurseries. Foods high in salt, fat and sugar were commonplace. Only 8% of nurseries surveyed served oil-rich fish such as salmon, trout, mackerel or sardines, foods which are rich in a number of nutrients useful in the diets of pre-school children.²⁷

The report also found that how well a child will be fed at nursery, and how well their health is protected, relies on where they live, whether the nursery is committed to good food, and – importantly – what parents can afford. Although Sure Start Children's Centres are part of a long-term government programme meant to "deliver the best start for every child",²⁸ the report found that only 40% of children's centres (or 27 of the 67 surveyed) served fruit or vegetables at snack time, compared to 70% of the state-maintained nurseries, 69% of private and 75% of voluntary nurseries.²⁹ A child's chances of developing diet-related disease in later life are greater if they come from a low-income background. Nurseries could be playing their part in reversing this trend.

Regulation of nursery food: England and Wales

The report found that existing regulation for nursery food was inadequate to ensure that all nursery food provision would meet children's nutritional needs. The compulsory nutrition standards covering lunches for children in nursery schools and daycare settings in England³⁰ had limited impact as they only applied to Local Authority maintained nursery schools (including Sure Start Children's Centres) and those maintained nursery schools attached to primary schools.³¹ They did not apply to private and voluntary nurseries which together make up 88% of total provision. Nor did they apply to meals other than lunch.

Another layer of standards in place for nursery

food at the time applied to all nurseries (state, private and voluntary) and covered the provision of fresh drinking water, which must be available all day, as well as awareness of children's dietary requirements such as food allergies, and which stated in a general way that "food and drink should be properly prepared, nutritious and comply with dietary and religious requirements".³²

In Wales, nurseries are regulated by the National Minimum Standards for Full Day Care published in 2002.³³ Standard 12 covers food and drink and states that the outcome on food and drink should be that "Children are provided with regular drinks and food in adequate quantities for their needs," and that are compliant with religious and dietary requirements, nutritious and "properly prepared".

But comparing both to the standards now set for primary and secondary schools in England, and the Appetite for Life Action Plan³⁴ in Wales, the authors concluded that nursery standards were inferior as there were no nutrient-based standards to show what nurseries should be serving and no exclusions or restrictions on what cannot be served. This meant wide variability in nutritional quality and nutrient content of the food served – often heavily affected by the skills, knowledge and budget of the nursery cooks. In contrast, school food standards are based on stringent nutrient requirements designed to meet the nutritional needs of the target age group, and are therefore more effective in improving nutritional quality and health.

2. The truth about nursery food

Inadequate inspection

It is likely that because Ofsted does not inspect to specific nutritional standards, inspections are unable to differentiate between good and bad food quality at nursery schools. Ofsted inspection teams did not have to check that the food on offer in private and voluntary nurseries complied with the limited 'food group' standards for state-maintained nursery schools described above. Inspectors judged whether the nursery has attained National Standard 8, which assessed only whether adequate supplies of food and water are provided and whether the food provided is 'nutritious'. As no definition of 'nutritious' exists for early years food, however, it is difficult – if not impossible – for inspectors to judge this.

Welsh nurseries are inspected by both the Government inspection body Estyn and by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW). Since April 2007, Estyn inspectors have been issued with new guidance on assessing healthy living and food and drink.³⁵ Inspectors now "must comment on whether the school has appropriate arrangements that encourage and enable learners to be healthy," as this reflects the Welsh Assembly Government's aim to develop a whole-school approach to nutrition. The phrase 'healthy eating and drinking' is not defined, and without nutrient standards it is hard for an inspector to assess whether the school is encouraging healthy eating effectively.

No government agency taking responsibility for nursery food

In writing the report, the research team was

passed from one Directorate to another within the Government's Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF). The School Food Trust did not at that time consider the food served to children while in pre-school day care to be within its remit,³⁶ and one of the report's key recommendations was that the DCSF (within Westminster and the Welsh Assembly) should take responsibility for nursery food.³⁷

"I have previously asked about the quality of school lunches at nursery and they tried to improve them but their knowledge of food nutrition was so basic – they hadn't got a clue."

Respondent to parents' survey, 2008

No food and nutrition training for staff

There is no requirement for nursery cooks or catering staff, or nursery managers, to undertake training in nutrition or cookery or to demonstrate a level of competence in the kitchen. Nursery school cooks in England and Wales must have a basic food hygiene qualification. Some Local Authorities go further and offer training schemes.³⁸ These may be compulsory for an area's state-maintained nurseries, but this is not the case for private nurseries which make up 73% of nursery provision.

There is no sector-specific cookery qualification for nursery cooks and no accredited national course for under-fives nutrition. To date, no national training scheme has been made available to help early years workers enforce the new requirements.

In contrast, the NHS health promotion agency, Health Scotland, undertook a nationwide programme of training in 2006 and 2007 for the early years sector, working with local professional and stakeholder groups in Childcare Partnerships. The aim of this was to build training to support implementation of their detailed food and nutrition guidance for early years care and to attract local funding to support this.

Whilst Government funds are available to Sure Start Children's Centres to promote healthy lifestyles by training Child Centre staff in developing healthy eating habits, in reality these programmes train only a minority of those working with the under-fives. The Pre-School Learning Alliance, a charity specialising in the early years, supports improvements in pre-school education, and believes the training should be available to private and voluntary nurseries too.³⁹

How we learn: meals as social occasions

Nurseries can promote a healthy eating environment. Sitting around a table with other children (and staff) who are eating a new food can provide a supportive peer environment that will persuade a child to try new foods. The more children that are eating the food, the higher the chance will be that other children will try the food too.⁴⁰ But the research carried out for this report found that 11% of nurseries gave only 20 minutes for lunch, while almost half the nurseries (49%)⁴¹ allowed half an hour.

Young children are learning how to eat complex meals, and as a result, eat and chew slowly. This helps maximise the nutrients absorbed from food

2. The truth about nursery food



eaten. They need to be able to eat at a leisurely pace. Time and flexibility needs to be built into the lunchtime slot to accommodate the slowest eaters, and to give time for social interaction and learning.

2.2 Where we are now

How many children are affected?

There were a total of 1,033,600 childcare places at the end of 2009.⁴² It is difficult to directly compare recent numbers with previous figures, as the categories have changed since the introduction of the EYFS in September 2008, but it appears that there has been a steady decline in the number of childcare places available in England since August 2008.⁴³ In the meantime, childcare costs have continued to rise across the UK. In England the cost of a nursery place for children aged two and over has risen by 5.1% (almost double inflation), with parents in London facing the highest reported costs, paying up to £11,050 per year for 25 hours childcare per week, or £22,100 for 50 hours.⁴⁴

Regulation: Early Years Foundation Stage

From September 2008, both sets of national standards for England were subsumed into the new Department for Children Schools and Families: Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).⁴⁵ The EYFS – the Government's 'standards for learning, development

and care for children from birth to five' – applies to *all* nurseries that offer places for children from birth to five. It is not specifically about food or health and does not significantly change the requirements in the national standards for food outlined above. However, it is a legal requirement that "Where children are provided with meals, snacks and drinks these must be healthy, balanced and nutritious".⁴⁶ In addition there is guidance (which is not a legal requirement) for childcare workers, suggesting they should "encourage children to try healthy food, involve them in the preparation of food and reinforce messages about healthier choices through, for example, discussions about children's food choices".⁴⁷

The regulation says nothing about cooking methods (i.e. frying), does not restrict provision of any foods nor state what may *not* be served; for instance, food with high levels of fat, salt or sugar; highly processed meat products, crisps, sweets, chocolate and fizzy drinks. It also only applies to food served at lunchtime.

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provides no additional regulation of the quality of food on offer in nurseries, no definition of what the government means by 'healthy and nutritious' for children in early years day care, and finds "babies and young children" responsible for "making healthy choices".⁴⁸ It is unlikely to improve the quality of food served in nurseries.

2. The truth about nursery food

Responsibility for nursery food? School Food Trust review of early years food standards

There are encouraging signs that the Department of Children, Schools and Families has now taken responsibility for overseeing the food served in day care to the nation's youngest children. The EYFS guidance is situated on the DCSF website,⁴⁹ Dawn Primarolo, the Minister of State for Children, Young People and Families, currently has responsibility for food and nutrition standards in the early years, and most importantly the Department have commissioned the School Food Trust to undertake a review of existing standards for nursery food as part of a wider review of the EYFS.

We support the SFT in this important review, and would urge them to consider our recommendations. We ask the government to safeguard the review process during the inevitable changes after the upcoming elections.

Ofsted: recent correspondence suggests still no inspection of food quality

Ofsted inspectors still have no criteria with which to judge the nutritional and other qualities of the food served in nurseries. Instead, the inspectors must decide: "the extent to which children *make healthy choices* about what they eat and drink" [italics added].⁵⁰

Instead of assessing whether or not the food on offer meets the nutritional needs of the babies and young children, inspectors are expected to deem a

nursery 'outstanding' if "[the children] show an excellent understanding of healthy eating and make healthy choices at snack and meal times". A nursery may serve highly processed food, high in salt, fat or sugar, so long as there is a healthy option for a child to choose. To achieve 'good' status, children are not even required to choose the healthy option, but should only "understand the importance of healthy eating".⁵¹

With no adequate definition of 'healthy and nutritious food' for young children, it is unsurprising that inspectors do not have adequate information on which to assess a nursery's food. We find it unacceptable, however, that the responsibility for making healthy food choices falls to children as young as two.

Training: still no compulsory training, but some private initiative

There has been no change to requirements for training of nursery staff in nutrition or cookery skills, and no national funding has been made available to allow staff to access training. No nationally accredited course in early years nutrition exists.

A group of nursery stakeholders have, however, begun the process of developing a national qualification for early years catering staff. With some funding from the Greater London Authority during 2009, the London-based food skills training initiative Good Food Training⁵² and social enterprise the London Early Years Foundation⁵³ have been piloting modules for a qualification that will cover key

cookery skills, menu planning, food purchasing and nutrition for under-fives.⁵⁴

Nursery food today

In conclusion, when considering food served in nurseries in England and Wales today, this is the situation:

- ▶ No clear, mandatory nutritional standards.
- ▶ No compulsory training for staff.
- ▶ No Government funding available to help nurseries improve provision.

There is some indication that the School Food Trust is starting to monitor the quality of food in nurseries, and therefore that the Department of Children, Schools and Families are beginning to take the lead in improving practice.

Better Nursery Food Now are encouraged to hear of this progress since the publication of our report in 2008, and strongly advise the Government to formalise the SFT's role in protecting our youngest and most vulnerable children in daycare, and to safeguard it throughout the inevitable changes after the forthcoming election. Until this happens, we will continue to assert that there is:

- ▶ No agency to monitor the quality of food provided.
- ▶ No Government department giving a lead or promoting good practice.

2. The truth about nursery food



2.3 Case Study: Tall Trees

- ▶ Money spent per day per pupil: **£1.20**
- ▶ Organic ingredients: **Yes**
- ▶ Local ingredients: **Yes**
- ▶ Unnecessary processed food: **No**
- ▶ Parents given information on menu: **Yes**
- ▶ Parents involved in setting menus: **Not regularly**
- ▶ Comply with CWT guidelines: **No**
- ▶ Menu analysed by a nutritionist: **No**

Tall Trees Kindergarten in Somerset focuses on providing good quality, local food for the nursery's 120 children. As owner Emma Comer says: "We believe that there's no point having the best possible care and education if you're going to feed the children rubbish."

Tall Tree's chef, Gareth Burgess, buys all his fresh produce from White Row Country Foods, a local farm shop. Gareth's also able to buy sustainable fish from award-winning fishmonger, Garry Rosser, who recently visited Tall Trees to talk to the children about where their fish come from: "You could see how the children were making the connection between fish in the sea and the fish on their plate."

The children at Tall Trees love Gareth's cooking and he is introducing them to a variety of flavours. "Today the children ate wild black bream with fennel and wholewheat organic spaghetti, with a tomato and sage dressing. For tea it was scrambled free-range egg ratatouille. They devoured the lot!" A particular favourite with the children is 'Jack and

the Beanstalk beans': "I use any leftover tomato soup and add giant butter beans to produce a whole new meal. The kids love it, it's not full of sugar and salt like the tinned stuff and it also reduces waste and cost." Gareth has a budget of £1.20 per child per day, but makes this go as far as he can: "The produce at the farm shop is a little more expensive, but by doing things like re-using the soup for beans, making stock from bones and adding pulses to meat dishes, I keep costs down which allows me to buy excellent produce."

Menu boards in the nursery tell the parents what's being served that week and each child has a log book to record what they have eaten each day. Parents are also encouraged to join the children at meal times: "the children have proper conversations with different adults which is great for their development and also helps us foster strong links with the parents," explains Emma.

For the older children, meal times also give them important life skills as they help prepare and serve vegetables and are allowed to pour their own water. Emma believes this to be an important part of the day: "The children feel like adults, particularly as us staff are sitting down and eating the same food with them." The food culture at Tall Trees also goes beyond meal times. Children spend time outside each day, no matter the weather and the nursery has its own fruit, vegetable and herb patches, which the older children tend to regularly.

2. The truth about nursery food

2.4 Mumsnet survey

In February 2010 we conducted a survey of 1,000 parents with children currently or recently in nursery through the social networking website Mumsnet.⁵⁵ Their responses demonstrate the vital importance that parents place on the quality of food served to their children while in nursery, and made it clear to us that parents are overwhelmingly in support of the aims of the Better Nursery Food Now campaign.

In response to the question, 'Thinking generally about all nurseries - would you be for or against the following', **nine in every ten parents (89%) wanted legally enforceable rules for the nutritional standard of food** in all nurseries.

More than nine in every ten parents were 'strongly' or 'somewhat' in favour of:

- ▶ **Compulsory nutrition and cookery training** for nursery staff preparing and serving food (94%).
- ▶ **The banning of additives** that are linked to behavioural problems or other health issues in nursery food (95%).
- ▶ **Government funding** to help nurseries improve food provision (88%).

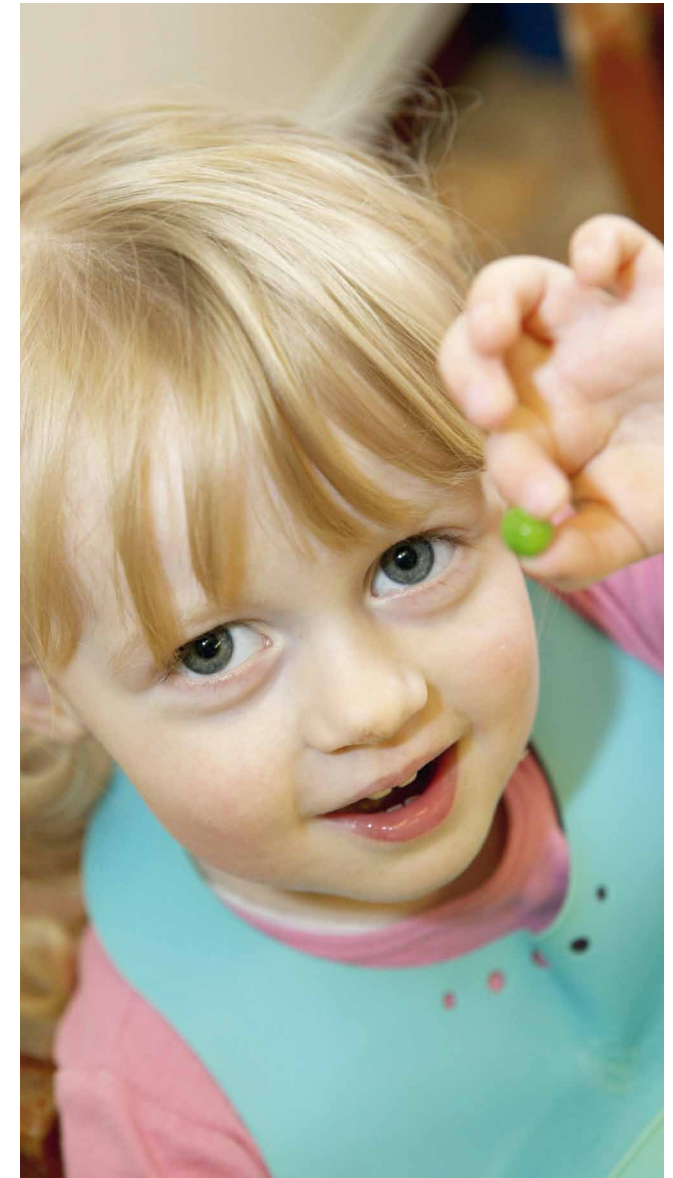
In addition:

- ▶ Four in every five parents (82%) wanted **foods like chips, sweets and chocolate, which are banned or restricted in primary and secondary schools, also banned in nurseries.**

- ▶ Seven in ten parents (69%) were in favour of **a government department being made responsible** for monitoring the quality of food provided.

When asked, 'do you think the food and food preparation in your child's nursery could be improved?', only one-third of parents (33.6%) said they were happy with their nursery's food provision. Over one third (35.5%) of the parents responding to the survey wanted to see more local, seasonal and organic food used in nursery kitchens, and one-fifth of parents wanted to see 'better quality food generally', with one in every ten parents asking for less 'junk' or convenience foods. One in every three parents (34%) felt they needed more information from the nursery about the food and its nutritional qualities; with almost a third of the total participants in the survey describing the information provided by their nurseries about food as 'poor' or 'very poor'.

The food served to their children at nurseries is of optimum importance to parents. Almost nine in every ten parents responding to our survey (89%) listed the quality of the food as 'very' or 'quite' important, with some saying 'crucial', when choosing a nursery.⁵⁶



3. Better nursery food now

'Better nursery food now' campaigners are pushing the government to put in place clear rules for nursery food. But we need your help to make the changes in nursery catering that will ensure every child gets the best nutritional start in life

3.1 What we're doing

Parliamentary campaign

As a charity and a campaigning organisation, our resources are limited and we feel they're best spent pushing the government for a change to regulation that will benefit children in all nurseries. Since January 2010, we have:

- ▶ Written to the Secretary for State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls, and the under-Secretary for State, Baroness Morgan, to ask for changes in regulation of nursery food, inspection of food quality by Ofsted, and funding for nutrition training for nursery staff.
- ▶ Worked with Joan Walley, Labour MP for Stoke-on-Trent North, to table an Early Day Motion (EDM) in parliament on nursery food. An EDM is a parliamentary petition that calls for a parliamentary debate on an important issue. EDMs allow MPs to draw attention to an issue and canvass support by inviting other MPs to add their names to the petition. Constituents can ask their MP to sign up to the EDM to show support for that issue. The text for the EDM is on our website, www.nurseryfood.org
- ▶ Proposed amendments to the Children, Schools and Families bill, so that the bill makes explicit mention of healthy food and extends its provision to Children's Centres as well as state-maintained nurseries. As this paper went to press, the bill

was approaching its Report stage in the House of Commons when we would find out if the amendments had been tabled. You can follow the bill's progress at <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2009-10/childrenschoolsandfamilies.html>

- ▶ Requested representation on the School Food Trust's review panel for nursery food.

Better Nursery Food in the media

Newspapers have been keen to cover the story of nursery food. Recently, we have been covered in the Daily Mail, the Independent, on Radio Humberside and were mentioned on GMTV, when Kate Garraway interviewed Baroness Morgan. You can read the articles and keep-up-to-date on campaign news on our website, www.nurseryfood.org/news.html

Support for other campaigns

One of the campaign's objectives is to highlight and support organisations who are campaigning for things that we believe will help improve nursery food. These include:

▶ The Children's Food Campaign

The Campaign wants to improve young people's health and well-being through better food – and food teaching – in schools and by protecting children from junk food marketing. www.sustainweb.org/childrensfoodcampaign

3. Better nursery food now



► Good Food for Our Money

This campaign wants new government legislation to set standards for food in schools, hospitals and prisons, so that food bought with our money is healthy, good for the environment and invests in local and sustainable suppliers.

www.sustainweb.org/goodfoodforourmoney

► Firm Foundations

The Firm Foundations Campaign is seeking to promote the need for investment and quality in early years settings, including greater investment in early years care, training for the workforce and universal entitlement to quality early years education and childcare.

<http://firmfoundationscampaign.org.uk>

► Feeding Young Imaginations

The Pre-School Learning Alliance's campaign seeks to address the lack of information and support for good early years nutrition.

www.pre-school.org.uk

Who's helping us

Organix, the baby food company, have kindly provided some of the funding for the campaign.

In addition, we're working with local authorities and caterers; campaigns, charities and social enterprises; trade unions and sector skills councils; nutritionists, parents and nursery catering and care staff in England and Wales.

A complete, up-to-date list of supporters can be found on our website, www.nurseryfood.org

3.2 What you can do

To protect children's health and their future, **nurseries** can:

Have a written food policy

Having a food policy helps you communicate your food values and approach to catering and care staff, families and inspectors. It means that everyone has something to refer to when considering food and nutrition, and can help embed good food practices in the culture of your nursery. It need not be complicated; a food policy is simply a list of things that the nursery agrees should be done with food.

Childsplay nursery in Newcastle's food policy objectives are to:

- Provide the freshest, most nutritious and best quality food [they] possibly can
- Serve a varied diet with meat, fish, potatoes, rice, pasta, dairy products and lots of fresh fruit and vegetables
- Foster a healthy approach to healthy living
- Promote mealtimes as social events
- Give parents information on all aspects of food in nursery.

The nursery food policy states "Childsplay will endeavour to use organic produce wherever possible" and "Children will be encouraged to eat five child-sized portions of fruit and vegetables a day".⁵⁷

3. Better nursery food now

Use more freshly prepared, local, seasonal and organic food

Nurseries can reduce their carbon footprint and their costs and ultimately provide more nutritious food to the children in their care if they buy locally produced fresh food that is in season, and try to use organic ingredients when possible. Food and fuel prices are increasing. Making links with local producers will save nurseries money, support a secure local food supply, and provide opportunities for the children to learn about where food comes from.

Organic food is better for human health, farmers and growers, the environment, countryside and wildlife, and for the animals we produce for food.⁵⁸ Organic farming produces less of the harmful greenhouse gases that are warming up the planet, helping to address climate change, making organic a better choice to protect children's future as well as their health.⁵⁹

The Food for Life Catering Mark scheme can support nurseries who want to use more fresh, local, seasonal and organic food. The FFL Catering Mark builds on the CWT standards; to achieve 'Gold' level, at least three-quarters of the food served in a nursery must be freshly prepared, half of the ingredients should be locally sourced and around one-third organic⁶⁰ Take up of the mark is growing: over 150,000 meals a day are now being served to Food for Life Catering Mark standards. The majority of these meals are currently being served in schools, but a growing number of nurseries have gained a mark or are working towards it.

Encourage a 'whole community' approach to food and mealtime

When everyone is involved in providing food, everyone benefits from improvement. An advisory group of parents and catering staff could be set up to feed back to the nursery about its food policy and practices, following the successful model of School Nutrition Action Groups (SNAGs)⁶¹ that have encouraged improvements in food quality and increase in meal uptake in schools. A 'whole school approach' could include care staff creating more food-based activities for the children and the staff joining the children to eat with them at mealtimes. Food can play a part in counting and maths, science, dance and art as well as cooking and growing. Food-centred activities are also a good way to introduce children to new types of food before they appear on a plate at lunchtime, encouraging receptiveness to unfamiliar foods.⁶² Parents and families and the farmers and producers supplying the food should all be encouraged to contribute to activities that educate the children about their food culture and where their food comes from.

Check menus against nutritional standards

The Caroline Walker Trust's 'Eating Well for Under Fives' guidelines are an easy-to-understand reference for menu planners⁶³. You could involve a community nutritionist; your local NHS Trust should be able to help find one. There is also nutritional analysis

software available, which is now commonly used by school menu planners to ensure school food meets the standards set by government. Nutmeg UK Ltd produce a software package that includes 1,600 recipes and enables nurseries to design menus and check that they meet the CWT standards. The software is simple to use reasonably priced (www.nutmeg-uk.com).

Mums, dads, friends and families can help too

by putting pressure on your nursery to improve its food offering, parents are one of the most powerful agents for change. You can:

Ask questions about the food served at your nursery

Helpfully, the Early Years Foundation Stage makes it a specific legal requirement for nurseries to share information about food and drink with parents.⁶⁴ The time to ask questions of the nursery manager is before your child starts at the nursery. Don't feel intimidated and guilty for asking – it is your right to know what the nursery intends to feed your child. If you feel you are not getting enough answers from the manager, ask to see the cook. If they are too busy, make an appointment to come back and see them another time.

Some questions you could ask follow below, and there are more online at www.nurseryfood.org/for-parents.html

3. Better nursery food now



On the menu

- ▶ Can I see a typical weekly and monthly menu?
- ▶ How much of the food is prepared from fresh ingredients?
- ▶ Have you had the menu checked by a nutritionist, or do you know if it meets Caroline Walker Trust guidelines? Does the cook have training in nutrition?
- ▶ Where do you source your meat? Is it organic or free range?
- ▶ Do you serve oily fish? If yes, what kind?
- ▶ What drinks do you provide between meals and at meal times?

Meal times

- ▶ How long do children have to eat their meals?
- ▶ Do the staff eat with the children, and eat the same food?

Food in the curriculum

- ▶ How do you help the children learn about food and health? Do they cook or grow any food themselves?

Sign our petition!

Join thousands of mums, dads, grandparents, nursery staff and concerned individuals in demanding better nursery food now. Our petition asks the government to put in place nutritional standards for food in *all* nurseries. It's quick and simple to sign, at www.nurseryfood.org

Join the campaign online and let us know about your experiences

The campaign's (www.nurseryfood.org) website has lots of suggestions for how parents, nurseries and the government can make improvements to nursery food and food culture. It has helpful sources of information on how to choose a nursery and what your child should be eating. You can also download the full report, *Georgie Porgie Pudding and Pie: Exposing the truth about nursery food*.

Better Nursery Food Now is now on Facebook. Share your experiences of nursery food- good and bad; join the debate and keep up-to-date with our progress at www.facebook.com/betternurseryfood

You can also follow our activities on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/nurseryfood>

Write to your MP

ask them to push for tough regulation for better nursery food. You can find details of your MP on the website www.writetothem.com

We haven't provided a letter for you to copy, because MPs are more likely to listen to their constituents' own voices. You are welcome to use details from this document, however.

ou can write to your MP and ask them to sign our EDM on Better Nursery Food Now. Details of how to do this are on the campaign website, www.nurseryfood.org

3. Better nursery food now

3.3 Case study: Cheshire

- ▶ Money spent per day per pupil: **Unknown**
- ▶ Organic ingredients: **No**
- ▶ Local ingredients: **No**
- ▶ Unnecessary processed food: **Yes**
- ▶ Parents given information on menu: **Yes**
- ▶ Parents involved in setting menus: **No**
- ▶ Comply with CWT guidelines: **No**
- ▶ Menu analysed by a nutritionist: **No**

Matt's daughter goes to a local nursery, part of a small chain of three, in Cheshire. A former chef and now stay at home dad, Matt has been trying to find out about his daughter's nursery food since he heard about our campaign.

"When I first spoke to the owner she just didn't want to discuss the issue whatsoever. I had a list of basic questions I wanted answered as a concerned parent.

"I was told by the owner that the menus were written by her then produced by the cook. She admitted that neither of them had any nutritional knowledge and that the menus had never been looked at by a nutritionist.

"The owner got quite aggressive with me, saying it was all a question of cost and ended up saying, more or less, if I don't like it I should take my daughter elsewhere!

"I felt really angry, but didn't want to jeopardise my daughter's place as she was really happy at the nursery. It isn't as simple as just moving her to

another nursery, and the owner knows that."

Despite this, Matt is sympathetic. "I understand that the owner has to run a business and it is hard to manage the expectations of a lot of parents." Matt believes the problems stem from a lack of skills and knowledge.

3.4 Case study: First Learning

- ▶ Money spent per day per pupil: **£2.60**
- ▶ Organic ingredients: **Yes**
- ▶ Local ingredients: **Yes**
- ▶ Unnecessary processed food: **No**
- ▶ Parents given information on menu: **Yes**
- ▶ Parents involved in setting menus: **No**
- ▶ Comply with CWT guidelines: **Yes**
- ▶ Menu analysed by a nutritionist: **Yes**

The First Learning Organic Day Nursery in Shepperton opened its doors in 2004 as the first in the UK to be approved by the Soil Association, with the meat, fruit, vegetables and dry food all supplied by local organic suppliers and menus based on seasonal ingredients.

First Learning's staff are open with parents about the nursery's food. "Each day, the amount of food and what exactly has been eaten by each child is recorded on a wall chart. This allows parents to see what their children are eating when they come to

pick them up," explains First Learning's manager, Brenda Stevens Baker.

Children at the nursery are served up to three freshly prepared meals a day and eat a variety of foods. Fish pie using only sustainable fish, fresh vegetables with dips and home-made puddings all feature regularly on the menu. The menus are assessed by the nursery's nutritionist in accordance with the Caroline Walker Trust's recommendations for feeding under-fives. The staff have found that the children are very receptive to new foods, especially when they see their friends eating them. As Brenda explains, "the children are eating the food because they enjoy it!"

Brenda also acknowledges the nursery's role in the children's development: "We take our responsibility very seriously and for many children their enjoyment and acceptance of foods begins in the nursery."

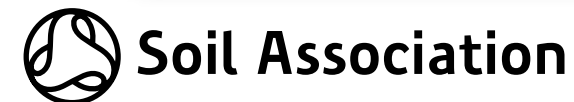
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Soil Association

South Plaza | Marlborough Street | Bristol BS1 3NX
T 0117 314 5000 | F 0117 314 5001

www.soilassociation.org

Registered charity no. 206862

Soil Association Scotland

Tower Mains | 18c Liberton Brae | Edinburgh EH16 6AE
T 0131 666 2474 | F 0131 666 1684

www.soilassociationscotland.org

Registered charity no. SC039168

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