

“Sugar in primary school meals has been cut by over a kilo”, thanks to West Sussex’s work as a Sugar Reduction Champion!

John Figgins, County Catering Service Manager, West Sussex County Council.
Alison Thomson, Public Health Project Officer, West Sussex County Council.

Introduction

Sugar reduction is a priority for West Sussex County Council; one in three children in Year 6 are above a healthy weight, thus improving diet and rebalancing calorie intake is a key focus, with sugar reduction largely contributing towards this.

In 2015, the Council focused on sugar reduction within primary school meals. Serving 30,000 meals a day to children from Reception Year to Year 6, this was a great opportunity to make small changes that could yield large health gains, reducing sugar consumption by young people at no extra cost.

Methods

Over a 20 month period, Public Health professionals worked with the Council’s County Catering Services Team, allowing the Catering Team to agree a partnership approach with the school meals service provider, Chartwells. The strong working relationship between all three parties enabled targets to be set for sugar reduction. Through intelligent menu engineering, recipe development, and portion size control, the menu was adapted without detriment to food choices, and maintaining the requirements of the School Food Plan standards.

Results

1 kilo LESS



- School meals now have over one kilo less sugar, per child, over an average school year. In total, 30,000 children per day are benefiting.

- Daily sugar consumption reduced from 16g to 9.5g per child.



- In total, during the 20 month project, the amount of sugar reduced in primary phase school meals equals three double decker London buses! That’s a 41% sugar reduction in 20 months!



- Customer satisfaction remained high. 86% of parents rated children’s overall experience of having school meals as excellent, very good, and good.

- Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) uptake rate is 85%.



- Menus are checked by the Children’s Food Trust and carry the ‘Menu Checked’ award logo, as well as passing stringent checks from the catering contractors nutritionists and the Council’s Catering Team, ensuring Ofsted compliance and parent assurance are achieved.

- Customer trend is now towards fruit and yoghurt choices, moving away from traditional sugary hot puddings, supported with emphasis on education to encourage healthy choice selection.

- Food wastage and packaging has been reduced.

Conclusion

This project has delivered significant results. It is a good practice example of achieving sugar reduction on a county population scale, at no extra cost. The results are generalisable to other UK primary school populations, and it is thus recommended as an effective sugar reduction tool that could be replicated across the country.

Sugar Reduction Tool for the Wider School Population

There are 1,650,000 children eating Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) alone in England each school day (85% of those eligible).



Assuming the baseline of sugar in UIFSM across England is similar to the WSCC baseline 20 months ago, application of the Sugar Reduction Tool across England could remove 2,062,500k (2,062.5 tons) sugar from pupils’ diets in years Reception to Year 2 alone.

That’s around the same weight as 172 double decker London buses!



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For enquiries, please contact:
john.figgins@westsussex.gov.uk

