

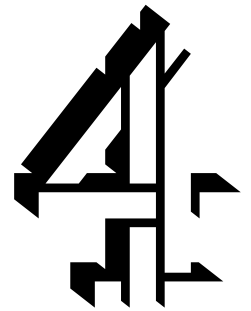
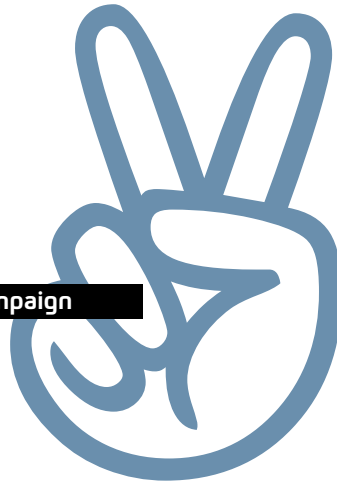
2 Make a difference

You want to make changes not enemies. This section arms you with the information you need to persuade schools that it is in their interests as educators to ensure that the students eat well. It tells you who makes the decisions and the best way to let them know your views, plus a host of ideas to help you organise an effective campaign.



2.1

Start a campaign



no more
minging
food

2.2

Who runs the show?

which
way

2.3

Activate and motivate



2.4



Don't complain, organise

Start a campaign

2.1

Unhappy with the meals at your school? Here's what you can do to change things
What's the best way to go about improving the food on offer at your school?
There are three possible routes for making a change.



Put pressure on the Local Education Authority (LEA) and the school meal supplier contracted by them, to provide better meals.

Most school meals are provided by suppliers contracted by the LEA but all too often the food is poor-quality junk. Your first step is to find out exactly who runs the show, who to contact in the school and what to do if you feel you're not getting a fair hearing. The path to change may be hard, and rocky. The suppliers are in business to make a profit and their relationship with the school or LEA may not be straightforward. Persistent, long-term, nationwide lobbying is probably the only way to force a response. Jamie Oliver's campaign is pressing for more government spending on school meals, and for minimum nutritional standards, which would rule out lots of the cheap and nasty foods currently being dished up to children. Check out Jamie's Feed Me Better campaign website to see how you can get involved.

www.feedmebetter.com



Persuade the school to switch to a different outside supplier from the one used by your LEA.

This is one way to give your school more say on what goes onto pupils' plates. The drawback is that all commercial contractors cost in a profit to the amount they charge, which might mean there's less cash to spend on better meals.



Create a stand-alone, independent service for your school

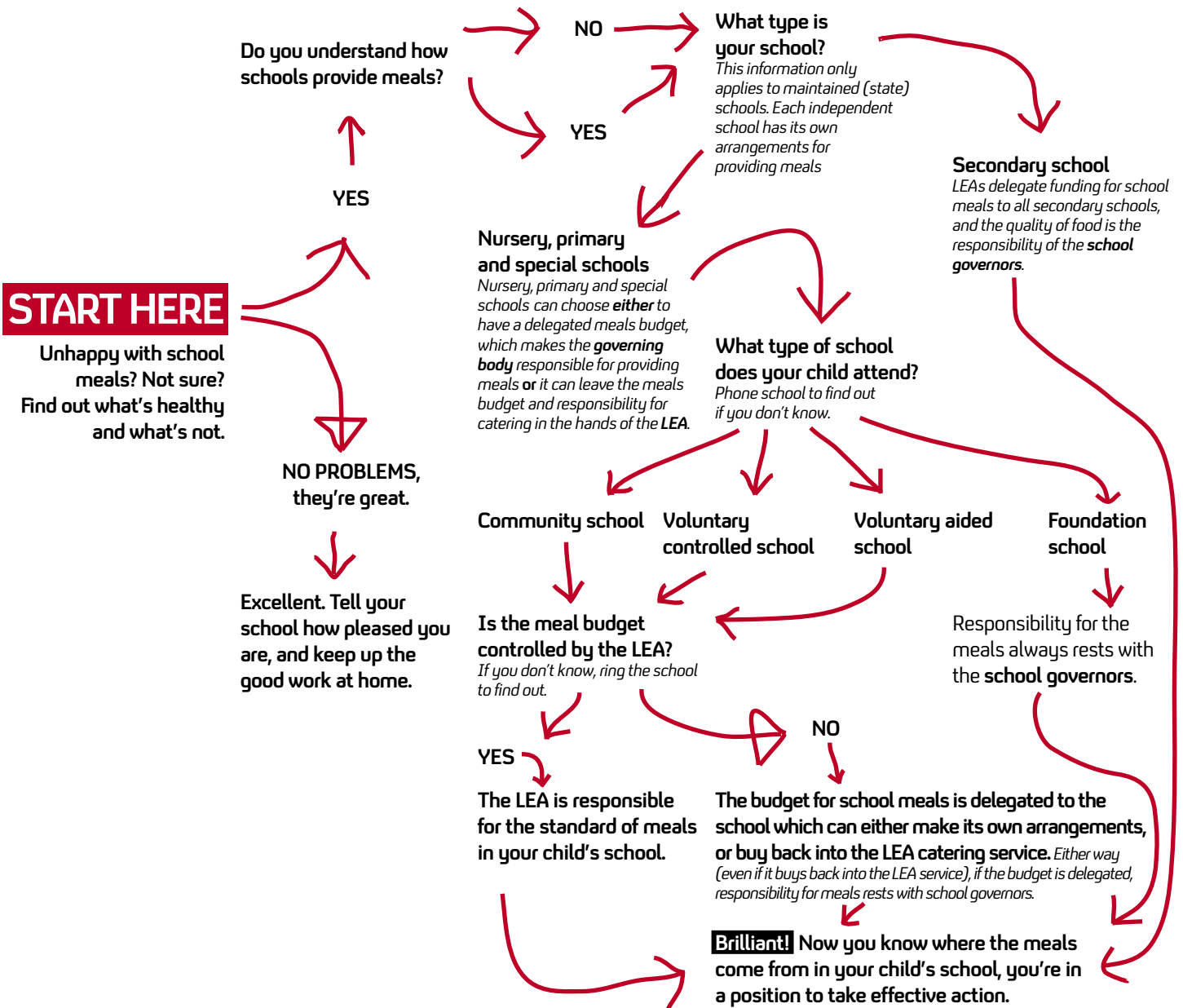
This option gives schools total control over their own catering and lets them use local, organic ingredients and develop varied and nutritious menus. Profits can be ploughed back and used to make the service even better. Taking on provision of meals for a school is a huge responsibility, and needs the wholehearted support of teachers, governors, catering staff, parents and pupils to succeed. The Soil Association's *Food for Life* action pack has details of how to set up your own catering service along with case histories of schools that have already done this successfully.

www.soilassociation.org/foodforlife

Who runs the show?

2.2

Just who is in charge of catering at your school? And what's the best way to go about getting changes if you're not happy? The truth is, it's all a bit of a maze – but just follow our instructions and you'll find your way through it.



Activate and motivate



2.3

Once you've found out who's responsible for meals in your child's school, how can you use your influence to improve the food?

Find out how the land lies

Don't dive in and tackle the meal providers straight away. You'll get far better results working *with* the school rather than setting yourself up in opposition.

Before you do anything else, talk to your own child or children. Find out if they're happy for you to wade in. Ask them if the Student Council has taken any action over school meals. Your case will be far stronger if pupils are raising concerns as well as parents.

Talk informally to other parents and carers to see if others are worried, too.

Raise your concerns informally first. Don't write or make a formal complaint without a real reason. Once things are 'on the record', it's far harder for either side to cool it, back down or compromise.

The next step

If other parents share your feelings, choose one or two representatives (not a big group) and arrange to speak to the head.

If you're a lone voice, ask your child's class teacher to pass on your comments or tell you who to contact. If you're not satisfied with the teacher's response, make an appointment to see the head.

You could also raise the matter with the School Association or Parents' Association, ideally by putting it on the agenda for a meeting which you can go to.

If you can't get to meetings, ask the school secretary how to contact the chair of the School Association (SA) and ask them to raise the matter for you.

What do I say to the headteacher or SA?

Before you meet with the head or SA:

- ★ Prepare your facts. Don't act on hearsay.
- ★ Bear in mind the school's perspective. Meals are just one of many concerns.

Explain the reasons for your concern and ask:

- ★ Is the school satisfied with the current arrangements?
- ★ If not, are they monitoring meals or can they arrange to do so?
- ★ If so, have they surveyed the students or asked parents if meals are satisfactory?

What happens next?

The head or SA may give you helpful new information. Perhaps the Student Council, school management team or governors are already discussing problems with the catering contractors.

If you're still not happy that the problem is being tackled, contact the chair of the governors (ask the school office how to contact them).

How can the chair of the governors help?

They can:

- ★ Tell you about the complaints policy. Every school must have one, monitored by the governors.
- ★ Organise another meeting with the head.
- ★ Take your comments back to the Governing Body.

I'm still not happy. What else can I do?

If your school's budget is controlled by the LEA, the LEA website may have a section on meals policies where parents can comment and receive feedback. If not, find out the name of the LEA officer responsible for contracting meals at your school, by checking the website or phoning. Write to them, outlining the issues you want to raise and events so far.

continued... 2.3.1



Activate and motivate

2.3.1

I've done all that, but nothing's improved.

What now?

If you believe that a governing body or LEA has failed to carry out a statutory duty, or has acted unreasonably, you may complain to the Secretary of State for Education.

Where can I find more information?

You can build your case by looking at www.parentscentre.gov.uk

The Department for Education and Skills publishes clear catering guidelines for primary and secondary schools at

www.dfes.gov.uk/schoollunches

If the staff of the school want to add their voice, there's information for teachers on provision of meals.

www.teachernet.gov.uk

The Government is encouraging school Governing Bodies to establish whole-school food policies.

www.governornet.co.uk

And if all else fails, you can contact the Secretary of State.

**Department for Education and Skills
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
Westminster
London SW1P 3BT**

Tel: 0870 000 2288

Fax: 020 7925 6000

E-mail: info@dfes.gov.uk



Don't complain, organise

2.4

There are loads of ways to place the healthy eating message firmly at the heart of your school. Here's some inspiration.

Out with the bad, in with the good

The Department of Health has been running the **Food in Schools scheme** which is tackling the problem of unhealthy diets on several fronts. It is piloting ways of creating and funding healthier breakfast clubs, tuck shops, vending machines and lunch boxes, as well as improving dining rooms, setting up cookery and food-growing clubs, and upping the amount of water kids drink. There are lots of useful resources on the Department of Health website. Go to www.dh.gov.uk and search for 'Food in Schools'.

Under the **School Fruit and Veg scheme**, during 2005, all 4-6-year-olds in state schools will become entitled to a daily free fruit or vegetable snack. If your children are older, ask the school tuck shop to stock fresh fruit alongside other snacks.

Get out and about

Ask your school to organise a trip to an organic farm so children can learn more about the realities of food production. Farms too far away? Try an online **organic farm trail on the Soil Association website** at www.soilassociation.org.

Exercise is just as vital as a good diet for healthy kids. Under the **walking bus scheme**, children and parent-helpers walk along set routes to and from school. It's free, fun, doesn't clog the roads or pollute the atmosphere, and gives everyone some useful exercise.

Build more activity into your child's life. Encourage daily outdoor play by providing inexpensive toys like balls, rope swings, frisbees and skipping ropes. Consider getting a dog. Take children to see live sport to inspire them to have a go themselves. Rope them in to help with active household jobs: cleaning the car, vacuuming, washing floors. And set a good example. Kids aren't likely to think about doing more physical activity if their parents are total couch potatoes.

Make something happen

After-school cookery clubs are great places to learn how to conjure up healthy and delicious meals.

The **British Nutrition Foundation** has lots of useful information about setting up a club.

<http://www.nutrition.org.uk>

Eating should be an enjoyable social experience as well as a treat for the taste buds. Once your school meals have improved, you could suggest inviting parents into school regularly to eat with children or setting up a pensioners' lunch club where children and older people can enjoy chatting over a meal.



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