

The new nutrient-based standards for school meals are now mandatory in all schools. This is the final piece of the school meal reform jigsaw. The standards ensure that school food provides all the essential nutrients and minerals that children need to be healthy and fulfil their potential. Here's what you need to know.

Headteachers' Questions Menu



Why have further school food standards been introduced?

Although the food-based standards restricted or removed certain food products, they did not ensure that each menu cycle would provide all the key nutrients children need. The nutrient-based standards do just that.

What are headteachers responsible for in respect of compliance?

As the budget for school food has been delegated, the school is responsible for compliance. In practice, many schools leave responsibility for compliance to their provider as part of their contract. However, schools should still ensure they are confident their menus are compliant and if the school has in-house provision they need to be actively involved in analysing their own menus.

How often should I carry out the nutrient analysis of my lunchtime provision?

As menus typically change according to season, an evaluation of the menu cycle once a term would be appropriate so a school would know that each different menu throughout the year was compliant.

Who is legally responsible for ensuring a school complies with the nutrient-based standards?

Chair of the Governing Body.

Do the nutrient-based standards require secondary schools to serve only two-course set meals, or can they still provide individual items (e.g. sandwiches)?

There is no restriction on individual items at lunchtime as it is the menu over a cycle which must be compliant. The nutrient-based standards apply to all food and drink included as part of the lunchtime provision – including items sold at break which will be consumed at lunchtime – and not just to the main meal option.

The vending machines in my school are used at both lunchtime and mid-morning break. How should I estimate the proportion of sales that occur at lunchtime to use in my calculation of an average school lunch?

Catering providers should make a reasonable estimate of the proportion of the vending sales that are contributing to lunchtime provision across the menu cycle.

If I have to change my provision at short notice (e.g. because we do not receive a meat order) do I have to re-calculate the average school lunch?

No. Overall provision that meets the standards will, to some extent, allow for small changes from time-to-time.

Will Ofsted be checking school food compliance?

A school's SEF requires it to indicate if they are compliant. The take up of school meals will be included as a school well-being indicator.

How do I know if my school is compliant?

All recipes and product specifications over a menu cycle should be entered into nutrient analysis software. The software produces graphs which show which nutrients are being met.

Remember – all the information you require is on the School Food Trust's website: www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk