Food and the Dining Environment
Sodexo has been working in the UK & Ireland education sector for more than 50 years offering both catering and facilities management services. We’ve harnessed our experience of serving meals to thousands of pupils every day to create ‘Food & Co. by Sodexo’, a new school food solution co-produced by pupils.

We are passionate about enhancing the quality of life of those we serve. We are concerned that nearly a third of children aged 2 to 15 are overweight. This means younger generations are more likely to become overweight adults and are more at risk of health problems. These children are also staying overweight and/or obese for longer, with the burden falling hardest on those children from low-income backgrounds.

We want to be part of a whole systems approach to help children and young people learn from an early age about healthy eating and the importance of activity in their lives so they can carry this information into adulthood.

To achieve this Sodexo are maximising their expertise and resources to develop evidence based and measurable solutions to tackle childhood obesity, close the learning inequalities gap, and make a lasting difference by:

» Engaging pupils to help develop our new brand Food & Co. by Sodexo.
» Developing a food offer that reflects current and future high street trends and pupils’ dietary needs and eating patterns.
» Creating a fully inclusive social environment and dining experience informed by pupils.
» Listening and responding to our clients’ request for support with the health and wellbeing agenda through our added value program designed to improve quality of life.
» Embracing our expertise to support the curriculum and deliver measurable outcomes.
» Working collaboratively to increase school meal uptake (paid and free) to create viable services with mutual benefits through a reciprocal approach.
» Empowering and enabling pupils to drive change and make informed choices.

A school food solution informed by pupils
Today’s generation of pupils are heavily engaged with food trends and brands. For young people dining out is all about grazing, speed, convenience and value for money when making their food choices – our research shows that our pupils are no different. We commissioned an independent market research company to investigate and test the needs and desires of key stage 2-4 pupils and to gather their feedback on our current school meals service and their dining experience.

We believe our new brand, Food & Co. by Sodexo, encompasses everything that pupils have told us is important to them in relation to both food and dining experience.

**A summary across all age groups:**

- More variety, practical, flavoursome and interesting menu options similar to their favourite high street brands.
- To eat in a relaxed, colourful and fun environment which provides sufficient respite from lessons and to feel safe
- To experience new ways of eating on-the-go so they can participate in other activities and relax with friends.
- Better pupil supervision and behaviour management so they feel less stressed.

**What do pupils want?**

- Early access to menus to enable them to make informed choices.
- Better information for parents/carers about our food so they will allow them to take a school meal.

The ideal food offer for all age groups:

- **Easy to eat** - such as finger food in a basket and pots.
- **Easy to access** - to reduce queueing.
- **Easy to enjoy** - favourite and familiar foods.
- **Easy to relax** - with friends and feel safe.
- **Easy to afford** - value for money.

Our consultation process ensures we adhere to the government advice set out in the School Food Plan - to drive change through the eyes of the pupil.
DEVELOPING A FOOD OFFER
That reflects high street trends and pupils’ dietary needs and eating patterns

We have created new marketing materials and merchandising techniques that appeal to pupils and tempt them to choose school meals and healthier options.

Our Craft Chefs have torn up the traditional school food offer. We’ve taken a leaf from the retail sector and created an environment and food offer that reflects the popular brands that pupils want to eat such as Nandos, Wagamama and Chiquitos, and various modern styles of eating ‘on the go’ e.g. food in a basket, whilst maintaining compliance with the government school food standards.

We are establishing a high-street based menu selector so that pupils’ families know what they are eating.

Our ideas will be kept fresh and healthy by continuing to engage pupils in our service development initiatives.

Our catering teams are receiving new training on our food style guide to ensure the skill-base, quality and effectiveness of our marketing and merchandising is consistent across all schools.
Creating a fully inclusive social environment and dining experience informed by pupils

Our new branding designs allow schools to select and create a dining environment that is tailored to their specialisms, ethos and school community e.g. sport-focus. Pupils will be consulted with to choose and design their own space to create a fully inclusive social environment. Food counters, displays and dining areas are being transformed into spaces where pupils and staff want to eat.

Chalk-effect menu boards, vinyl backdrops behind serveries, eye-catching hanging boards and posters are just some of the ways that we are quickly directing pupils to their food of choice by choice, improving pupil flow, reducing congestion and creating modern, trendy dining environment.

The overhaul of school dining areas and experiences encourages more pupils to use their school catering service which means more young people are eating nutritious and well-balanced meals in a more relaxed environment that aids their health wellbeing and learning outcomes.
Listening and responding to our client’s request for support with the health and wellbeing agenda

We have always delivered initiatives with schools that educate and engage pupils in health and wellbeing but acknowledge this was often ad-hoc, unstructured, unsustainable and did not result in measurable learning outcomes.

Informed by our annual Clients for Life consultation we understand that schools would welcome our support with:

• Promoting healthy eating within the school which is linked to the curriculum.
• Providing families with advice on healthy eating.
• Generating meaningful pupil engagement with the school food service supporting families to provide healthier packed lunches.
• Ideas to engage and increase free school meal uptake to reduce inequalities.

Our new Public Health expert is working with our food and catering teams to develop an added value programme for schools to help us make a positive difference to the lives of the young people we serve. Agents for Change, Project Cook, Packed Lunch Policy Guidance, are the new range of flexible initiatives that can be adapted to meet the needs and demands of your own school community.
Embracing our expertise to support the curriculum and deliver measurable outcomes

Project Cook is our new school cooking programme that supports and inspires pupils to develop a lifelong love of food and cooking through teaching. The programme links with the national design and technology curriculum and is aligned to the core competencies for cooking and nutrition at key stage 2 and 3. Project Cook also forms part of pupils’ personal development, helping them to make informed choices about healthy eating.

By maximising our know-how and show-how on site we are:

• Teaching pupils where food comes from and how to safely store it.
• Teaching pupils cooking skills and how to use kitchen equipment safely and with confidence.
• Providing schools with evidence of learning outcomes linked to curriculum.
• Encouraging pupils to share their knowledge and skills with family and friends to promote positive behavioural change.
In collaboration with schools, we are implementing our Agents for Change programme which sees peer-elected pupils take on the role of food and health champions with responsibilities for impartial monitoring and influencing our on-site food service. Together the Agents will form an expert group that will be instrumental in ensuring our food offer consistently meets and exceeds the needs of all pupils resulting in improved service quality and uptake of school meals.

The Agents will be offered the opportunity to take reasonable and responsible action in relation to their school food service by working with the school’s senior leadership team, Governors and our on-site management team. They will be provided training and tools to help Agents do their job independently.

Empowering and enabling pupils to drive change and make informed choices

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The positive impact of our Agents for Change programme will not be confined to our school food services; wider benefits will be delivered that enhance pupils’ learning outcomes for example:

- Pupils will be empowered to have their say and encouraged to become active health advocates in their communities.
- Our Agents roles will give pupils the opportunity to learn life skills such as communication and business development; build character and be responsible citizens.

The impact and learning outcomes of this programme are aligned to OFSTED’s criteria for health, curriculum and PSHE.

Sodexo knows when children eat better they are more likely to do better - leading to improved quality of life outcomes.

Working collaboratively to increase school meal uptake to create viable services with mutual benefits through a reciprocal approach

The School Food Plan makes clear the importance of a healthy school meal in helping young people to do better. It places an emphasis on efficient management of food provision to establish a viable school meal service by shifting pupils from eating packed lunches to school meals.

Our school food offer meets the standards set by government to restrict foods high in fat, sugar and salt. However, current government school food legislation doesn’t consider food brought from home even though evidence shows in most cases packed lunches contain double the recommended fat, sugar and salt intake and below the recommended nutrient levels.

A good packed lunch policy is known to improve healthy eating behaviour among young people yet developing and implementing such a policy is not easy as it impacts the whole school community.

We have used our expertise to develop tools, resources and training programmes to help schools successfully create and embed a packed lunch policy that meets the needs of young people and is aligned to the government’s Eatwell Guide and School Food Standards, to ensure an equitable school lunch experience.

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