

Practical exercise 5: The dining experience

Better Eating, Better Learning (BEBL) wants every child and young person to have a positive experience during school mealtimes, so that these mealtimes become a valuable learning experience that they look forward to, enjoy, and most importantly, choose to be a part of.

As part of this exercise, participants should **experience a school meal as pupils** **experience it** – ranging from queuing and choosing what to eat, to paying and eating at the dining table. Sit alongside pupils during the meal and talk to them about their mealtime experiences – the positives and the negatives.

After the meal, discuss in groups what you have observed and learned from the experience, and what changes and improvements could be made to improve the overall dining experience for pupils. Think about:

- **Queuing** – Is the queuing system well organised? Were you served quickly?
- **Serving** – How well is the food presented? How do catering and school staff interact with pupils? Are pupils encouraged to make healthy choices? Is there a good selection of food for the pupils and staff to choose from?
- **Payment** – Is it efficient and straightforward?
- **Dining** – Is there enough seating? Do you have enough personal space at the table? Are the cutlery and plates fit for purpose? Is the dining furniture and environment clean?
- **Food** – Is it well presented, attractive, healthy and tasty?
- **Atmosphere** – School dining halls are usually bustling and noisy, but was there a friendly and pleasant atmosphere in which pupils could enjoy their meal?
- **Menu** – Is there clear information about what is on offer, and cost?
- **How it compares to the ‘competition’** – In many secondary schools the catering service may have some competition from high street stores, takeaway outlets and mobile vendors beyond the school gate. How did your experience today compare with what they offer? What makes your service better than theirs? How best can you demonstrate the benefit of the school meals service versus a service primarily concerned with profit?

Taking your observations into account, are there any changes that could be made to improve the overall dining experience for pupils?



For useful information you can check BEBL and the BEBL Self-Evaluation Tool:

Read the sections on [School Food and Drink Provision](#) and [the Dining Experience](#) in BEBL.

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