



The Good Food Guide for Schools

How schools can implement the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Food
Charter



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This guide is available in large print, plain text or other formats on request.

Introduction



Why good food matters to schools

For schools, good food is a powerful tool. It supports pupils' health and wellbeing now and for the future. Good nutrition aids learning and cognitive function.

Good food education equips young people to become healthy citizens who understand how to cook, eat well, care for their community, and make choices that protect the planet.

Signing up to the [Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Food Charter](#) is the first step in raising the profile of food in your school.

Getting the most from your guide

This guide helps you build a positive vision for food in your school, and to bring food into your curriculum.

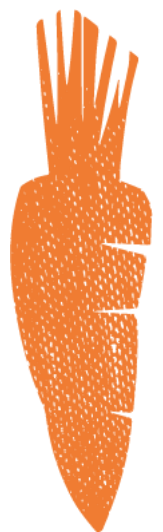
It has three sections: Whole School Ethos, In the Kitchen and In the Classroom. Each has its own set of practical ideas and links to further resources. A final section sets out how Sustainable Food Cornwall can help.

Short of time? Go straight to the Key ideas table overleaf.

Need to talk it through?

Contact Danielle Young, Food in Education Development Worker

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Key ideas

Schools can bring the [Charter](#) to life through three interlinked areas.

WHOLE SCHOOL ETHOS	IN THE KITCHEN	IN THE CLASSROOM
• Introduce and communicate a food policy that sets out your school vision for food, and share it with children and stakeholders. • Protect adequate time for meals, and make dining spaces somewhere pupils can eat unhurried. • Think local: map local farms, suppliers and food initiatives that can support the school. • Model positive eating behaviours and language around food: create a healthy lunchbox policy and make sure staff model it. • Explore ways to help families access fresh, affordable food.	• Introduce a 'plant forward' menu: put vegetables and pulses at the heart of more dishes. • Look for small swaps. Where can ultra-processed foods (UPFs) be swapped out? Where can veg be swapped in? • Offer a range of different vegetables, and encourage children to try them in fun ways, without pressure. • Have tasters on the tables that children can choose to try. • Introduce less but better meat: high welfare, locally produced.	• Make food a core part of the curriculum: explore it through a range of subjects. • Teach cookery life skills: knife handling, baking, following and adapting a recipe. Allow repeated practice, not one-off attempts. • Start small with school food-growing projects, and involve children in planting, harvesting and cooking what they grow. • Teach pupils to read food labels, understand nutrition and assess environmental impacts. • Explore the wide range of careers in the food system.



Setting your food vision

Whole-school food policy

A whole-school food policy gives everyone in your school community one consistent, inclusive approach to food.

It sets out your vision for school meals, packed lunches, snacks, breakfast and after-school club food, and food education. It builds in healthy choices and sustainability, and takes account of the needs of all pupils, including those with SEND. It also gives staff a shared position to model.

Think local

Map the local farms, growers, fishing businesses, suppliers and food initiatives that could support your school. Knowing who is on your doorstep is what makes the rest of this guide practical rather than aspirational.

Local and seasonal choices sit at the heart of the Charter, and they run through every section that follows: what the kitchen buys, what children grow, and the careers they hear about.

Advice and templates

[Food a Fact of Life: whole school food policy](#)

[Food for Life: packed lunch policy template \(PDF\)](#)

[Chefs in Schools: school food toolkit](#)

[School Food 4 Change: Whole School Food Approach framework \(PDF\)](#)

[Public Health Agency: Establishing a whole school food policy \(PDF\)](#)



Food in everyday school life

Protect time for meals and a positive dining environment

Giving pupils enough time to eat makes a real difference. Unhurried meals support better nutrition and digestion, reduce stress and fatigue, and give children the chance to talk to each other.

Where lunch is rushed, children tend to eat less of the healthy food on offer and more food is wasted. It can also affect mood and energy through the afternoon.

You might consider pedagogical lunches, where teachers eat with children. Teachers then model healthy eating and good table manners, the dining hall is calmer, and relationships between staff and pupils are stronger.

Introduce a shared language around food

Clear, neutral language helps create a positive atmosphere around eating.

Rather than describing foods as 'good' or 'bad', talk about balance and variety: 'everyday' and 'occasional' foods. Linking food to energy, focus and wellbeing makes the conversation practical.

Acknowledge different cultural, religious and individual preferences. Open, non-judgemental language makes conversations about food feel inclusive for everyone.

Involve the community

Bring parents, carers and local organisations into your food work. That might mean healthy cooking workshops, meal ideas in the newsletter, a school garden project or a community food event.

You can also support parents directly, with practical guidance on affordable lunch boxes and by pointing families towards local healthy eating and budgeting help.

Working with local farm businesses and health professionals improves access to fresh food and raises awareness of balanced eating. When food education is a shared responsibility, families feel supported and healthy habits last.

[Food a Fact of Life: parental engagement](#)

Buying local and seasonal

Procurement

Buying locally and using seasonal produce is often fresher, tastes better and offers better value. Local food travels shorter distances, which cuts food miles and emissions.

Good relationships with nearby farmers, growers, fishmongers and butchers help you find what is fresh and affordable while supporting local businesses.

Buying less but better-quality meat, and making vegetables the star of more meals, can make menus more nutritious, more sustainable and more cost-effective.

Introduce a 'plant forward' menu

Plant-forward meals:

- can be cheaper and quicker to source and cook, freeing up capacity for better quality and more interesting dishes
- support sustainability and reduce the school's carbon footprint
- open up a pupil's palate to different vegetables and dishes
- cater well for religions and cultures that embrace plant-based meals
- are rich in fibre and lower in saturated fat, which supports better long-term health



Helping children try new foods

- Create a colourful, inviting salad bar or other 'build your own' option, so children can explore at their own pace. Arrange fresh, colourful choices attractively, mixing new foods with familiar ones.
- Offer taste tests or 'try it' days: small samples of a new food or recipe that pupils can try without pressure. Ask them what they thought.
- Rotate choices and celebrate seasonal produce. Highlight local or seasonal ingredients, with displays about where the food comes from.
- Roast or lightly season vegetables to bring out their flavour.
- Use appealing, sensory language: 'crunchy rainbow salad'. Describe food rather than moralising about it.
- Normalise tasting. Teachers and staff trying new foods with enthusiasm is the strongest signal there is.
- Use peer modelling: mixed age group seating, or pupil food ambassadors.
- Create group challenges, such as 'Try Something New Tuesday'.



Look for small swaps

School chefs can make a big difference to pupils' nutrition through small, manageable changes.

Simple switches help: reduce ultra-processed foods, use wholegrain options such as brown rice or pasta, and blend tinned mackerel with tuna to boost omega-3.

Adding extra vegetables to sauces, soups and bakes increases fibre and vitamins without altering the taste. Making bread, soups and sauces from scratch where you can cuts added salt, sugar and preservatives.

Food Allergies and Dietary Requirements

When introducing new food activities, always work within your school's allergy policy and ensure staff follow existing allergy-management procedures. Check allergen risks at the planning stage and ensure staff involved are aware of relevant pupil needs and allergy-management arrangements.

[Allergy UK: Schools](#)



Growing and cookery

Growing and composting

Growing, composting and collecting water help children understand where food comes from, how natural systems work, and why caring for the environment matters. Working hands-on, they learn about plant growth, nutrition and sustainability, and see waste turned into something useful. When children are given the opportunity to learn how to grow food, they become more curious about it. This exploration and connection to food can increase their willingness to try new fruits and vegetables.

Growing also builds curiosity, patience, teamwork and problem-solving, and supports wider curriculum skills: science (life cycles and ecosystems), maths (measuring and calculating), literacy and art.

Local growers can help you get a project off the ground.

[RHS: get growing](#)

[Garden Organic: growing guides](#)



Cookery skills

Cooking gives young people skills they will use all their lives.

A structured cooking curriculum helps pupils understand ingredients, prepare balanced meals, build technique and make informed choices. It builds confidence and creativity, and opens up the cultural importance of food. It also gives them the practical knowledge to eat well throughout life.

Cooking draws on maths, English, science and history, so it earns its place across the timetable rather than sitting apart from it.



[Food a Fact of Life: food and life skills](#)

[Food for Life: cooking in the curriculum](#)

[Leiths: primary cookery curriculum overview](#)

Careers and critical thinking

Careers in food

Cornwall's food sector offers far more jobs than most pupils imagine: sustainable farming, food science, artisan baking, butchery and fisheries among them.

Connecting pupils with local producers, chefs and food businesses shows them what is actually on offer close to home. It supports the local economy, and helps keep traditional Cornish food skills alive.

[Great Cornish Food: the academy](#)

Critical thinking

Thinking critically about food helps young people make informed choices.

They learn to question advertising and social pressure, understand nutrition and sustainability, manage money, and see how food affects their health, their environment and their community.

[Rethink Food: food education and critical thinking](#)



How we can help

We help schools place food at the centre of learning, wellbeing and community life. By joining the [Charter](#), your school becomes part of a movement across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, working together to improve nutrition, strengthen environmental understanding, and build lasting connections between schools, families and local food systems.

Under the inspection framework in use since November 2025, schools receive a report card graded across six areas. Work on school food contributes directly to three of them: inclusion, personal development and wellbeing, and attendance and behaviour.

What we offer

- Expertise and resources from our partners, listed below, to build staff confidence and skills
- Teacher training in growing, composting and outdoor learning, alongside tailored projects with individual schools
- Guidance and resources for food policies, curriculum progression and developing growing spaces
- Plot-to-plate projects bringing together growing, cooking and food education in curriculum-linked ways
- Links with local farmers, growers and food businesses, enriching learning and strengthening community food networks
- Pupil voice and leadership through the Cornwall School Food Forum, so young people help shape local food culture and policy
- Countywide coordination, including a Community of Practice for school food, supporting shared learning and long-term change

Who we work with

[Chefs in Schools](#): A national charity, founded in 2018, that trains school kitchen teams to cook from scratch and bring food education into the dining hall.

[Great Cornish Food Academy](#): Part of the Great Cornish Food programme, run by the team behind the Great Cornish Food Store in Truro. It introduces pupils to careers in Cornwall's food, farming and fishing sector.

[RJ Working](#): A Cornish young people's charity that uses Restorative Practice to build connection and youth leadership. With Sustainable Food Cornwall, it supports young people to grow, cook and serve food and lead conversations about Cornwall's food future.

[TastEd](#): A charity offering free sensory food education lessons and training for primary schools and early years settings, helping children explore fruit and vegetables through their five senses, without pressure to eat.

Worth knowing

Allergy safety

Statutory guidance applies from 1 September 2026. Your school needs a published allergy policy separate from its medical conditions policy, a named allergy governor and senior lead, allergy awareness training for all staff including catering, and spare adrenaline auto-injectors.

[Allergy safety in schools \(DfE statutory guidance\)](#)

[School food standards: allergy guide \(GOV.UK\)](#)



School Food Standards

A legal requirement for state-funded schools, and the governing body is responsible for making sure they are met. Updated standards are due from September 2027, so menu changes you make now are a head start.

[School food standards \(GOV.UK\)](#)

Free school meals and breakfast clubs

From September 2026 free school meal eligibility extends to all children whose families receive Universal Credit. The national rollout of free breakfast clubs began in April 2026. Both mean more pupils eating school food, which raises the return on every improvement you make to it.

[Free breakfast clubs: guidance for schools and trusts \(GOV.UK\)](#)

[School meals and nutritional standards \(House of Commons Library\)](#)

[Chefs in Schools Brighten Up Your Breakfast Club Guide](#)





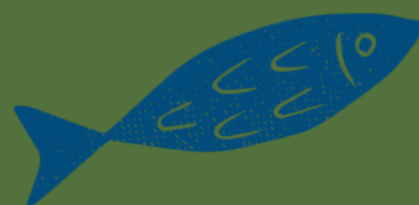
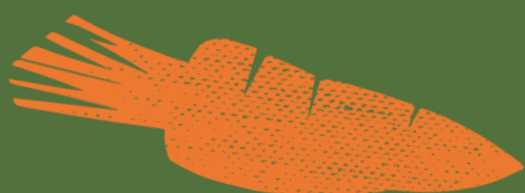
Turn good intentions into lasting change

Joining the [Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Food Charter](#) helps schools turn good intentions into lasting change, for pupils, communities, and the food future of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

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