

School Meals - UK - August 2009

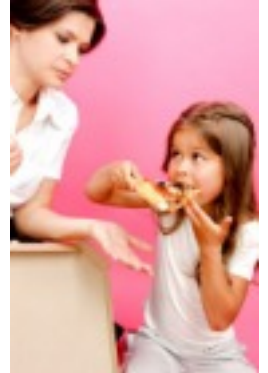
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What is this report about?

With the final deadline for nutritional guidelines set for September 2009, many government ministers would no doubt like to see the end of the school meals debate. However, for operators trying to mix the somewhat opposing concepts of attempting to run a profitable, commercial enterprise whilst meeting demands for social responsibility and welfare issues, the hangover from Jamie Oliver's campaign is likely to continue for many years.

Key issues covered in the analysis

- The decline in school meal take-up has been halted. But it still remains difficult to influence the longer-established eating habits and taste preferences of older children. As a result secondary school take-up remains a long way behind that of primary schools.
- The school meals market is worth £1.33bn. Take-up will increase in secondary schools as primary school children from the 'new era' of healthy school meals start to age and enter the secondary school sector. Growth in the school meals market place is a long-term objective for caterers.
- Almost a quarter of schoolchildren who are eligible for free school meals (FSMs) in England aren't claiming according to the School Food Trust (SFT). Biometric cashless (and cardless) payment systems improve the uptake of FSMs by making eligible pupils more anonymous. They also reduce administration levels as well as queuing times.
- Healthier school meals continue to dampen demand, although 'whole school' approaches and improved dining facilities do help to buoy take-up. Caterers are urged to adopt more of a high street mentality and business-minded approach to selling school meals with a stronger focus on branding canteens and marketing the school meal provision.
- Including schoolchildren in the marketing of the school canteen fosters a sense of 'ownership' of the school meals provision.
- Growth in the market is likely to be restrained because of parental perceptions. Only a fifth of parents think that school meals are good value for money, and barely one in six are prepared to pay more for healthier school dinners.
- A third of parents say their child is a 'fussy' eater: Offering a range of food stations (eg sandwich/salad/jacket potato bars) should do better at appealing to these demanding pupils by allowing greater scope for customisation.



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Scope of the report

This report considers the market for school meals provided to children attending primary and secondary schools. It specifically excludes the provision of catering services to Higher and Further Education establishments such as colleges and universities. As well as the state education sector (known as 'maintained' schools), the report also includes the independent or private sector ('non-maintained' schools).