



Ocado: Nourish (formerly Healthy Zones)

End of grant report – April 2025

At School Food Matters we believe that food at school can unlock a happier, healthier, more sustainable future for every child. The Nourish programme (formerly Healthy Zones) supports schools to make sustained positive changes to their school food environment to ensure that nutritious food is accessible throughout the school day to every child. The programme supports primary and secondary schools to implement a whole school approach to food by engaging the whole school community from children and staff to parents and governors.

This year, we have been delivering the programme in Wandsworth and Islington. This was the first time piloting the ‘cascade’ approach, where we trained members of Wandsworth and Islington Local Authority as Project Officers (PO), who then delivered the work in schools. Throughout the year, we gained insights into how this model can work in the future. A highlight of this approach was the LAPO’s ability to weave additional local initiatives for schools into the programme.

Throughout the year, Nourish has continued to make positive changes in a variety of school settings across Wandsworth and Islington.

Nourish Schools

Borough	School	No. of children impacted
Islington	St Mary Magdalene Academy	210
Islington	Winton Primary	232
Wandsworth	St Boniface RC Primary	311
Wandsworth	Alderbrook Primary	227
Wandsworth	Ronald Ross Primary	246

Local Authority Project Officers

This project piloted a ‘cascade’ approach, in which a Senior Project Coordinator from School Food Matters trained members of the Public Health teams in the local authorities to deliver the programme as Project Officers (LAPOs). Throughout the programme we learnt about the challenges and benefits of this approach.

Challenges included LAPOs lacking the necessary skill set and high staff turnover within local authorities. This highlighted the importance of School Food Matters being directly involved in recruitment, ensuring that staff recruited as LAPOs have the right background in nutrition and appropriate knowledge about working in schools, and that they are hired on permanent contracts at the council. It also became clear that shifting to a ‘see one, do one, teach one’ model was more beneficial than the theory-based training that we started with.

Despite these challenges, working closely with local authorities had clear benefits. Their local knowledge and networks helped schools engage with wider initiatives. For example, in Wandsworth, all three schools were supported in achieving the Healthy Schools award, alongside their work on Nourish. In Islington, St Mary Magdalene is partnering with the local authority to establish a family community kitchen.

These findings have been instrumental in the design of how this model can work in future programmes.

Getting started – surveys and observation days

At the start of the programme, the schools' Senior Leadership Teams completed a survey which asked a series of questions about food at their school. All five schools completed these surveys. The findings from this survey, along with those from the observation day and introduction meeting, provided POs with a starting point on which to guide the development of the school's action plan.

Food policy

There was a mixture of whether schools were monitoring school food through policy implementation or staff engagement.

- Some schools (n=2) reported that no one was monitoring School Food Standards, some (n=2) said that there is a governor responsible but only one said that school food is a regular item on governor's meetings.
- Leadership around school food was also mixed, some schools (n=3) said that school food is a standing item at leadership meetings, some (n=2) said that it wasn't.
- Some (n=3) schools reported having a school food policy that was regularly monitored, reviewed, and updated, with a named person responsible for maintaining it. The other two schools had no school food policy at all.
- All schools indicated that they had clear rules regarding nutritious packed lunches, but none had a named person responsible for making sure the rules are applied, and appropriate, positive support is provided to children, parents and staff when rules are broken.

It was apparent that schools were interested in improving their monitoring of the school food, particularly packed lunches. This led to a focus on writing and implementing packed lunch policies.

Inclusivity of school food

There were issues of inclusiveness of school food, particularly for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

- Most schools (n=4) said that all children, including those receiving free school meals, can afford a balanced meal, however only one said that they have policies in place to actively encourage healthier spending (pre-ordering, breaktime capping etc.)
- Some schools (n=2) said that they didn't have policies or procedures to support children with SEND around nutrition and some (n=3) said they did but they aren't consistently applied.

These findings encouraged POs to make this a focus of the programme in many schools. This included writing it into action plans and delivering sessions and training on inclusivity of school food for parents and staff. POs ran sensory food education sessions and training about cautious eating, two sessions that are designed to support children with SEND.

Parent and child engagement

Most schools had some processes in place through which to engage with children and parents on topics of school food. However, there was room for improvement in terms of formalising these processes.

- Most schools (n=4) said that there were processes that support children to share opinions and suggestions with SLT about school food e.g. dedicated student ambassadors or reps, but that children weren't represented when making decisions about school food for example, in SLT meetings and meetings with the caterer.
- Most schools (n=3) said that parents were informed of the school food policy and contacted when they don't follow the rules, but only one school that they offer opportunities for dialogue around school food - for example, coffee mornings, chances to come in and eat school lunch, nutrition workshops.

These findings led to a focus on engagement sessions for children and parents throughout the programme. See below for more details.

Engagement sessions

After drafting their action plans, schools chose engagement sessions to run, choosing from options such as staff training on School Food Standards, child and parent cooking sessions, gardening sessions and sensory food education for children. In total, we delivered 25 sessions, engaging children, parents and school staff. We also gathered feedback from participants and insights from Project Officers, which are summarised below.

Packed lunches were a priority

As mentioned previously, schools were keen to develop or enhance their packed lunch policies. To support this, POs ran engagement sessions with staff and parents that provided information and ideas about including more nourishing options in packed lunches. They also ran SEND specific sessions for parents, which helped parents to feel more comfortable with the packed lunch policy.

"The packed lunch change would have been really difficult without the SEND coffee morning and you guys had the expertise to deliver that and we didn't. It's signalled a change in the whole school ethos around food and that's great!" – Head teacher



Pictures: packed lunch parent workshop at Alderbrook

"I will be giving my children more vegetables in their packed lunches"- Parent

"I will try some of today's food in the house and in lunch boxes" – Parent

Sensory food exploration

POs also carried out sensory food exploration sessions with parents, staff and children, which helped them to start conversations about adapting policies for children with SEND.



Left picture: parent workshop at St Boniface Primary. **Right picture:** Sensory food exploration at Ronald Ross

"After this session I will offer (my child) a variety of foods, experiment with new foods." – Parent

"After today I will introduce food's without telling children they have to eat it. Looking, touching, smelling, and listening are ways to encourage positively instead. " Parent

Additional support from Wandsworth council.

Wandsworth Council provided strong support for the programme. They commissioned three training sessions that School Food Matters delivered in schools in the borough. These sessions included gardening teacher training, cooking teacher training and governor training. These sessions were well attended by schools participating in the project and beyond and received positive feedback. In addition, the council caterer, Harrisons, established 'Harrison's Helpers' —food ambassador schemes in all three schools—to support ongoing consultation with the catering team. The council also implemented a food waste recycling system in the schools and ran assemblies and interactive sessions with food ambassadors to promote it.

Feedback

We gathered feedback from **93 parents, 29 children, and 29 members of staff**, following engagement sessions. These sessions provide members of the school community with hands-on sessions about different aspects of the school food environment. These sessions aim to engage children, staff and parents in positive changes to the school food environment. They also aim to provide children and parents with cooking skills and encourage them to try new foods. For staff, these sessions aim to provide them with an understanding of their role in school food and to build their confidence in this role.

Parent Feedback:

Following the session:

86% feel more confident in contacting the school with questions or feedback about school food.

95% feel positive about the school taking action to improve access to nutritious foods.

92% now better understand the school's approach to nutrition.

Parents reported feeling more confident about:

81% Trying recipes from the session.

88% Introducing new foods and flavours to their children.

87% Cooking with their children.

Child Feedback:

79% of children said that following the session, they felt more positive about the school making the food healthier for everyone.

Children also reported feeling more confident about tasting new foods and flavours, trying healthy packed lunch ideas and cooking at home

Staff Feedback:

Staff reported feeling more confident about talking to children about food, their statutory requirements around the school food standards and taking action at school to improve school food.

"I have a better understanding of how to communicate with the children regarding their lunches." – Midday Supervisor

"[The session was] very clear and articulately delivered" – staff member following school food standards training

Learning and sharing sessions

We ran a mid- and endpoint learning session with schools which gave us an understanding of the successes and challenges they were facing during the programme, allowing us to gather feedback and make adjustments during the programme. The points discussed below are based on these sessions and on the experiences of the Project Officers.

Successes

Engaged parent community

At both mid- and endpoint sharing sessions, schools spoke about how well they have been able to engage parents throughout the project, something that they said they often struggle with. Having the support of POs with lots of knowledge and experience was enticing for parents and often the sessions were fully booked.

"Having your expertise, having you speak to parents directly. The workshopping was invaluable – having that hands-on experience, we just wouldn't have been able to deliver that." – Teacher

This has led to support from parents when implementing packed lunch policies and other changes to the school food environment. Despite pushback from parents around changes to school food often being mentioned as a concern by schools, many said that it's been easier than they thought.

“The feedback was really positive, some of the parents that I thought would be more challenging were absolutely fine. The guidelines have been shared, and no one has asked for individual adaptations, they’re all getting on board.” – Head teacher

Conversations around the food on offer at school

Similarly, at both mid- and endpoint sharing sessions, schools said that the programme has started conversations with both the staff involved in the programme and the wider school community about the food on offer at school.

“It’s started a genuinely interesting and valuable discussion about school food from the top down. Even though those conversations are challenging. The conversation starting has been really valuable. This will definitely carry on!” – Headteacher

Schools often mentioned that although that had been intending to write or refresh school food policies, without the support of the PO, it would’ve taken a lot longer or not been done at all. Schools said that having templates and support to write the policies was extremely helpful due to their demanding workload.

“We previously had a packed lunch policy, but with the support, it has become clearer, and the impact is now quite visible.” – School staff

What could be improved?

Healthy Schools award

As previously mentioned, Wandsworth schools were supported to gain their Healthy Schools award alongside working on the Nourish programme. Some schools said that this often felt like a lot of work, however they were pleased when it was completed. This has led us to think more about how the Nourish programme can work alongside the Healthy Schools award to ensure that it isn’t overwhelming for schools.

Legacy – continuing to support schools

This year we have been thinking about the legacy and sustainability of the programme. We have been meeting as a team to design and trial some new ways of supporting this. This has included things such as providing additional training to the LAPO so that they can continue the work, as well as ‘legacy packs’, which include resources such as posters, recipes and assemblies for schools to use after the programme has come to an end.

During the endpoint sharing session, schools had some good suggestions on how to continue to support them after the programme ends. This included ‘top-up’ training on topics such as School Food Standards and sensory food education as well as support with gardening and online check-ins to see how the school food policy is progressing.

What’s next?

We have now concluded the programme in Wandsworth and Islington schools. Schools have launched or are in the process of launching their packed lunch policies and many are hoping to continue to with other elements of the programme including engaging parents in discussions around school food and running gardening clubs.

We are also conducting a full evaluation of the programme, which includes data collected from the schools (such as surveys, observation days, and learning and sharing sessions), as well as findings from interviews with key people conducted at the start and end of the programme with schools, local authority staff, and the School Food Matters Project Officers. These findings will help us refine the programme further and deepen our understanding of the challenges schools face regarding school food and will be completed in May and can be shared if requested.

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School Food Matters