



# What is the Impact of Pastoral Care Training on School Mealtimes – A Case Study



**Dr Karen McInnes, Head of Learning,  
Teaching and Research, Norland College**

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## **Introduction**

This report presents the findings from a funded research project looking at the impact of pastoral care training on school mealtimes, specifically the lunchtime service in one school. Many children in the UK receive school meals (Children's Food Trust, 2017) which have the potential to provide an important learning experience for children in terms of social skills, nutrition and language development (Blatchford & Sharp, 1994) however, it is an under-researched area. There is limited research focused on the food choices children make and parental concerns regarding those food choices (Nelson et al., 2006; Children's Food Trust, 2016); links between nutrition and academic performance (Anderson, Gallagher & Ramirez Ritchie, 2017) and the dining environment provided for children (Pike, 2010). There is more research in relation to social interactions and language development during school mealtimes (e.g. Degotardi, Torr & Nguyen, 2016) however, there appears to be a lack of research in relation to improving the lunchtime service for children and minimal research which includes the child's voice (Hansen, Hansen & Kristensen, 2016).

Chartwells – Compass Group, the catering and support services provider, supply catering services to schools in the maintained and independent sectors, colleges and universities. Their catering services

are underpinned by the following principles: Great food, which is freshly cooked and nutritious; Community, being fully involved with school teams with which they work; Innovation, bringing new ideas to their service and Supporting their Schools, ensuring they cater to the needs of each school. Previously, Chartwells invited Norland Consultancy Services to deliver bespoke pastoral care training for staff in the schools they work with in order to improve the lunchtime experience for children. The training was based on observed lunchtime practice however; the impact of the training was not evidenced at the time, although anecdotal evidence supported its efficacy.

Therefore, Chartwells commissioned Norland Research, Training and Consultancy Department to conduct a small research project to evaluate the impact of the pastoral care training delivered by Norland Consultancy. This was an impact evaluation case study involving one school on the pastoral care training delivered to catering, school and design staff. As a part of the research process children's voices and views were collected and used to inform the training. The research focused on: the impact of the training, and subsequent changes to the lunchtime environment and service, the staff involved with planning, delivering and facilitating the school lunchtime service and the children's lunchtime experience from the perspective of the children. The research consisted of pre and post training observations of the lunchtime service, including the recording of noise levels, pre and post questionnaires completed by catering and school staff, pre and post focus group interviews with children and the use of videography by the children. The different data sets were analysed separately and then combined thematically and reported in terms of pre-training findings and post-training findings.

## **Executive summary**

The findings from the research study demonstrate that the pastoral care training on school mealtimes delivered in one school has:

- Been successful in changing the lunchtime service for the benefit of children and staff.
- Been successful in incorporating the voices and views of children into the training resulting in changes which would not otherwise have been made.
- Increased the visibility of food choices for children so they can make more appropriate and healthy food choices.
- Increased the amount of healthy food items children are eating and drinking.
- Enabled children to be more independent during the lunchtime service.

- Reduced the amount of movement by children during the lunchtime service.
- Resulted in greater time for peer interaction and socialisation with children engaging in sustained conversations with peers on a variety of topics.
- Resulted in less dependence on, and interaction with, staff.
- Identified the need for further changes to be implemented and addressed.

## **Literature review and rationale for the study**

Food in school matters. What children eat and how it is delivered impacts on their education, health and wellbeing (The Scottish Government, 2014). Across the UK it is estimated that between 50% and 60% of all children have school lunches, as opposed to packed lunches or going home for lunch, and in England an estimated 4.25 million children have school meals which makes lunchtime an important part of the school day. However, historically, school lunchtime has been a forgotten part of the school day (Blatchford, 1989) and dining halls have, traditionally, been used as multi-purpose areas. Consequently, school meals have been viewed as a necessity needing to be completed in a relatively short period of time so that the area can then be used for other learning experiences such as physical education (Dudek, 2005).

In terms of what children eat, within the maintained school sector, there are minimum food-based standards relating to the nutritional content of school lunches with which schools must comply (Children's Food Trust, 2017). However, research suggests that children still tend to make food choices that contain higher amounts of fat, especially food items such as such as fried or chipped potatoes and pasta with sauces, although children can make healthier food choices when encouraged to do so (Nelson et al., 2006). In addition, parents have voiced their concerns regarding the food choices their children make, the food they eat and the lack of control they, as parents, have over this process (Children's Food Trust, 2016). Parental concerns would appear to be justified as research evidence indicates that where schools provide, and children eat, healthy school lunches, children score higher on academic achievement tests (Anderson, Gallagher & Ramirez Ritchie, 2017).

How food is delivered to children also matters and there are a variety of environmental factors which impact on children's eating behaviours. Factors such as seating, management of queues, noise levels and dining utensils have all been shown to affect the quality of the children's lunchtime experience as well as their food choices and food intake (Stroebele & de Castro, 2004; The Scottish Government, 2014). Queueing has been found to be particularly frustrating for children and can often take up a

considerable proportion of their lunchtime and often makes the children's lunchtime experience appear rushed (Moore et al., 2010). In addition, the time children have for lunch varies considerably in primary schools ranging from 30-105 minutes with a median time of 60 minutes which includes play time (Nelson et al., 2006; Rahim et al., 2012).

Noise levels also contribute to a less than positive dining experience for many children (Moore et al., 2010) although certain types of noise can positively influence eating behaviours. Stroebele and de Castro (2006) found that listening to music while eating increased college students' food intake and the duration of their meal. In addition, it is recognised within the restaurant sector that playing music can influence diners' food choices and how much money they spend (North, Shilcock & Hargreaves, 2003). Crockery and cutlery also impacts on the dining experience with the provision of plastic plates and utensils undervaluing the dining experience for children, which are often selected for convenience, rather than to provide a positive lunchtime experience (Moore et al., 2010; Pike, 2010). Overall, there is a need to invest in the dining environment provided for children in order to optimise their dining experience and influence their eating behaviours (Moore et al., 2010) with the ideal environment being one that more reflects family or restaurant models of dining (Pike, 2010).

There has been limited research on the dining environment provided in schools and its effects on learning but one study, conducted in primary schools, involved redesigning and reorganising the dining area and demonstrated greater on-task behaviour after lunch and an increased ability to learn (Golley et al., 2010). The changes to the dining environment encompassed many of the environmental factors discussed above including: the introduction of a new queueing system, redecoration of the dining hall, new furniture and art work on the walls. Similar findings have also been demonstrated in secondary school settings (Storey et al., 2010).

As well as academic learning, it has been shown that the dining hall can be utilised as a space for facilitating social learning. The concept of the 'pedagogic meal' was developed in Sweden in the 1970s and this refers to the linking of the school dining experience to social learning and the part adults play in the dining room (Lalli, 2018). This concept describes the way that teachers and support staff interact with children during lunchtimes to facilitate children's socialisation behaviours around food, their interactions with others and their language development. Within this model, adults are expected to eat with children, talk with children and act as role models in the eating process. The limited research in this area tends to show that there is minimal teacher-child interaction during mealtimes and that teacher interactions, when they occur, are predominantly directive rather than social. However, in support of the concept of the 'pedagogic meal', opportunities to develop children's language and

social skills are created when adults sit down to eat with the children (Degotardi, Torr & Nguyen, 2016; Hallam et al., 2016).

Although a large number of children are receiving school meals, this is an under-researched area (Pike, 2010) with all the research areas identified above requiring further research. In addition, the voices of children in relation to school lunches are largely missing from most of the research in this area (Hansen, Hansen & Kristensen, 2016). However, there is a growing interest in this field of research and the majority of schools do want to improve their lunchtime meals service to ensure a better learning and social experience for children (Maddock, Warren & Worsley, 2005).

### **The research study**

This research study was an evaluation of the impact of the pastoral care training in relation to the school lunchtime service delivered to staff in one school. The pastoral care training was delivered over one day to the teaching and catering staff in the study school and suggested changes from the training were shared with the design team responsible for implementing physical changes to the lunchtime environment. Due to the lack of research in this area and the absence of the child's voice in previous research, this research study aimed to capture the child's voice in relation to the lunchtime service both pre and post the pastoral care training. The child's voice was incorporated into the pastoral care training delivered to staff so that they could reflect on children's views regarding the lunchtime service and experience. This would ensure children's voices were taken into account in relation to any changes made to the lunchtime service.

The research aims for this study were to evaluate the impact of:

- Pastoral care training on staff involved with planning, delivering and facilitating the school lunchtime service.
- The training on the children's lunchtime experience from the perspective of children and staff.



## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

The research study was a two stage impact evaluation case study. An impact evaluation assesses the effects of an initiative on the outcomes for participants with the goal of identifying the impact of the effectiveness of the initiative (Higgins, 2017). In this study the initiative was the pastoral care training delivered by Norland Consultancy. The first stage consisted of capturing the voices of children regarding the lunchtime service which were used to inform the training. In the second stage effectiveness was measured by the changes made to the lunchtime service as a result of delivery of the training and how these changes were perceived by both staff and children. The design utilised mixed methods using a convergent parallel mixed methods design (Creswell, 2014). This is where both quantitative and qualitative data are collected, analysed and combined to provide a detailed and holistic evaluation of the case. One of the benefits of using mixed methods is an increased confidence in the accuracy of the findings through triangulation of the different data sets which results in a more complete picture of the issue being studied, in this case the impact of the pastoral care training (Denscombe, 2017). The same data collection methods were used at both first stage (pre-training) and second stage (post-training).

### **The setting**

The school was an Independent school in the South East of England. The school had six classes; two reception classes with children aged 4-5 years, two year 1 classes with children aged 5-6 years and two year 2 classes with children aged 6-7 years. There were approximately 40 male and female children in each year group. Each class had a qualified teacher and teaching assistant and there was also a Headteacher and school secretary. There were five catering staff from Chartwells including the Catering Manager.

All children and staff received a school lunch. Staff and children sat in the same dining hall but at separate tables and all staff supervised the lunchtime service. Service was staggered with the reception classes going into lunch first and years 1 and 2 taking it in turns to go to lunch after the reception classes. The reception classes went outside to play after their lunch and years 1 and 2 went outside to play either before or after their lunch depending on when they had been for their lunch.

All children wore aprons during lunch to minimise any mess to their clothing. Food was served by the catering staff at a servery and children queued to choose their meal. Menus for the week were



available on the school website for parents to look at with their children and the day's menu was discussed in class prior to the lunchtime service. Every menu was planned three weeks in advance and for a three-week period, and the catering team reviewed all menus in response to seasons, pupil feedback and national themed events. All menus were planned to be nutritious, high-quality and there were vegetarian and halal choices to cater for different diets. In addition to the daily menu there was a fruit and salad bar with a variety of fruit and salad choices for children and bread, cucumber and carrots sticks available on the tables. Water was also available for children. Once children had chosen their lunch they were able to choose where to sit in the dining hall. Once they had finished their meal they returned their plates to a waste area and then went out to play or back to their class depending on the time they had their lunch.

## **Sample**

The case study school was selected using purposive sampling by Chartwells. A requirement for selection was that none of the school or catering staff had previously received the pastoral care training and the lunchtime service and environment had not undergone any recent changes.

### *Children*

In total 109 children, 58 males and 57 females, aged 4 to 7 years of age took part in the study and were observed during the lunchtime service. Consent to take part in the study was not received from the parents of six children and these children were excluded from the study.

There were 20 children, 10 males and 10 females, who took part in the focus groups which included six reception children, seven year 1 children and seven year 2 children. There was one group of five reception children, one group of five year 1 children, one group of five year 2 children and one mixed group from across reception, year 1 and year 2. All children were purposively sampled to ensure a representative sample from across the year groups.

A sample of four children wore portable Go Pro video cameras; two children, a male and female, from reception and two children, a male and female, from year 2. Again, children were purposively sampled to be representative of their year groups with an additional height requirement. One child from each year group was of average height for the year group and one child from each year group was smaller than the average height for the year group. This was to ensure that the lunchtime service could be viewed from different height perspectives. It was envisaged that the smaller children might highlight

particular issues relating to height. In addition, it was ensured that children were happy interacting with a variety of other children and adults and were willing to wear the cameras.

### *Adults*

In total 19 adults took part in the research study. There were 14 members of the school staff who were observed during the lunchtime service and completed questionnaires, including the Headteacher and the school secretary. All members of staff were female.

There were five members of staff from Chartwells, two males and three females who were observed during the lunchtime service and completed questionnaires, including the Catering Manager.

All 19 members of staff received the one day pastoral care training.

### **Pastoral Care Training**

The pastoral care training was delivered by Norland Consultancy over the course of one day in the study school. It was delivered to all school and catering staff and consisted of:

- Viewing the dining experience from the child's perspective – sounds, smells and environment using the feedback from children's focus groups, observations and the video footage.
- Understanding child development – physical development, social and emotional needs and responses.
- Understanding what children need from the adults around them during the mealtime experience – the importance of the adult role.
- Observing the Go Pro video footage and staff analysing and reflecting on what they could see from the child's view point
- Evaluating and reviewing the current lunchtime provision and devising new ideas and initiatives in the best interests of the children.

## Methods and Materials

The following methods and materials were employed:

- Two electronic questionnaires using Esurveycreator were distributed before and after the pastoral training care training had been delivered and the changes to the dining service implemented (see appendices A and B). The questionnaires were completed by the school and catering staff to elicit their views about different aspects of the lunchtime service and the training received.
- Narrative observations of lunchtime service were conducted by staff from Norland Research, Consultancy and Training department to provide a detailed view of the lunchtime service. Observations were conducted during two lunchtime services at the beginning of the project and two at the end after the changes to the lunchtime service had been implemented. The observations conducted prior to delivery of the pastoral care training were used to inform the training.
- Noise levels, using noise level monitors, were recorded in the dining room during the lunchtime service prior to the changes and after the changes had been implemented.
- Focus group interviews were conducted with children at the beginning of the project and at the end after the changes had been implemented. Two semi-structured interview schedules were constructed (see appendices C and D) and all focus group interviews were video recorded. The focus groups interviews conducted prior to delivery of the pastoral care training were used to inform the training.
- Videography using Hero 5 Go Pro cameras with SD cards and chest harnesses were used. Cameras were placed high on the chest to provide a clear view of the lunchtime experience whilst not interfering with children's eating. The video footage was used to inform the pastoral care training.

## Procedure

The research study took place over six months. Go Pro cameras were sent to the study school in advance of the first visit by the Norland research team. Children wore the cameras so they could get used to wearing them and the other children used to seeing them. The research team then visited the study school for two days at the beginning of the project prior to the pastoral care training. During the two days, four focus groups with children were conducted and these took place in a room on school

premises where there were no other distractions. Prior to the lunchtime service on both days, Go Pro cameras were fitted on the sample children and worn for the duration of the service, they were then removed at the end of service. The research staff observed and wrote narrative observations throughout the lunchtime service on both days. After the two day visit questionnaires were sent out to all school and catering staff for completion. Analysis of all data sets was conducted and findings incorporated into the pastoral care training which was delivered seven weeks after the two day visit to the school.

After the training changes were agreed and implemented and a second two day visit was made to the school by the research team. This occurred 14 weeks after delivery of the pastoral care training. The procedure for the second two day visit was a replication of the first two day visit.

## **Ethics**

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines were followed (BERA, 2011). All participants were informed of the true nature of the study and how their data would be used so they could give informed voluntary consent. Voluntary informed consent was gained from all school and catering staff for their participation in the study. Information about the study was provided at the beginning of the questionnaire and completion of it was taken as consent. Informed voluntary consent was also gained from staff for them to be included in all observations of the lunchtime service and to be captured on Go Pro video footage. Additional consent was given for the video footage to be used for training and dissemination purposes. Staff were assured that the collection of information was not a judgemental process but an evaluative process to improve the lunchtime experience for children.

Voluntary and informed consent was gained from parents for their child to participate in the study. Consent included observation and videoing of the lunchtime service, participation in focus group interviews and the wearing of Go Pro cameras. Additional consent was given for the video footage to be used for training and dissemination purposes. Where consent was not given the children ate their lunch in the dining hall but out of view of the video cameras. The research team provided child friendly information regarding the research project to class teachers who then used this to talk with children. Ongoing verbal assent was gained from children and the research team were alert to verbal and non-verbal signals from children which might signify their wish to no longer participate in the research study. Verbal assent was gained and captured on video camera from children participating in the focus group interviews. Verbal assent was also gained from children prior to fitting the Go Pro cameras on them.

Participants were advised of their right to withdraw their participation and information up to the point of writing up the data. All data was stored securely and in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and subsequently the Data Protection Act (2018). All information remained confidential and any data used was anonymised with participants being referred to by number. However, video data used for training or dissemination purposes could not be anonymised and participants were informed of this during the consent process. It was not anticipated that the physical or psychological wellbeing of participants would be adversely affected by participating in the research study. If any safeguarding issues were raised, these would be addressed through the school's safeguarding policy. The research project received ethical approval from Norland College's Research Ethics Committee.

## **Findings**

### **Analysis**

A number of different data sets resulted from this research project. The pre-training data sets consisted of: 19 completed staff questionnaires, narrative observations of two lunchtime services taken on consecutive days, noise level recordings taken at two time points during the lunchtime service on two consecutive days, four focus group interviews with five children in each group and video data from four children wearing portable Go Pro cameras during the lunchtime service on two consecutive days. The post-training data consisted of the same data sets as the pre-training data although only 15 staff completed the questionnaires.

The data from the staff questionnaires was collated and analysed by question. The narrative observational data was analysed thematically. The noise levels were collated and reported as descriptive statistics. The focus group interviews were transcribed, answers collated and analysed by question and the video data was observed, narrative observations were written and these were analysed thematically. Pre-training and post-training data sets were collated separately and a thematic analysis was then conducted on each collated data set (Braun and Clark, 2006). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, organising, describing and reporting themes found within a data set. The phases of analysis followed those suggested by Nowell et al., (2017):

- Phase 1 gaining familiarity with the data
- Phase 2 generating initial codes
- Phase 3 searching for themes
- Phase 4 reviewing themes

- Phase 5 defining and naming themes and phase 6 producing the report.

The themes identified were: physical aspects of the lunchtime service, temporal aspects and social aspects which accorded with the thematic analysis conducted by Moore et al., (2010). However, an additional theme was identified relating to food and nutrition. The analysis was conducted by the researcher who had not been involved in the pastoral care training.

## **Pre-training findings**

### ***Physical***

Physical aspects of the lunchtime service encompassed a variety of sub-themes and these were visibility, resources, noise and movement.

#### *Visibility*

The observations taken of the lunchtime service and the Go Pro video footage showed that at the servery children often had difficulty viewing the food available to them and this was especially true for the smaller children. As one child said, “you can’t see all the food, you can’t see it but you can smell it”. This was also true at the salad/fruit bar which was quite high and no children could see the choices higher up and the smaller children could not see the choices at all. There was a member of the catering staff stationed by the salad/fruit bar to help children make choices. But this could be a time consuming process and often children made the same choices at the salad/fruit bar knowing it would be there. However, children were aware help was available to them, “[Adult name] can tell you which salad you want and you can ask her for it”. All staff were aware that visibility was an issue for the children. In addition, it was noted that visibility between the children and catering staff was hampered at the servery. Across the top of the servery there was a glass bar where trays and plates were placed however, this, coupled with the smaller height of the children, meant that it was difficult for eye contact to be achieved between adults and children which could impact on communication. One member of staff habitually bent down to ensure she could gain eye contact with children.

Visibility was also a problem at the waste area. Children stated that there were pictures and writing on the waste bins so they knew where to put their different waste, however, children sometimes put items in the wrong bins. The smaller and/or younger children were observed standing on tip toes trying to see to put their waste in the correct bins and on more than one occasion were observed

placing an item in the incorrect bin. Whilst staff recognised there was a visibility issue at the servery and salad/fruit bar, the visibility issue at the waste area was not referred to in the questionnaires.

### *Resources*

Resources encompassed the crockery and cutlery used by children, the seating arrangements as well as the waste arrangements. In the school, children in the reception classes used compartmentalised plastic trays which held both their main course and dessert. These children were also given their cutlery to place in a compartment on the tray. The reception children in the focus group interviews stated that the trays were often heavy for them and they were often observed having difficulty taking them down from the bar on the servery; catering staff would hand them down to the children. In addition, it was observed that there was the possibility of different food items being mixed when serving and the Go Pro footage showed a number of occasions when custard was inadvertently dripped on their main course. It was also noted that salad items were placed on top of the hot food. Children in years 1 and 2 used separate plastic dinner plates and dessert bowls which they liked, however, if they then chose items from the salad/fruit bar there was a logistical issue in being able to carry it all. As one child stated, “if we take yogurt and get given fruit as well then someone helps us go to our seat”. Children in years 1 and 2 were able to choose their own cutlery rather than being given it, however, they often chose the adult cutlery which was rather large for them to use.

Once children had chosen their meal they sat at a table to eat. Reception children were aware that they had to place their tray on the table in a particular way, with their main course in front of them, they then turned the tray around when they were ready to eat their dessert. On the tables were plastic cups and jugs of water which staff served to them because, as one child stated, “the jug is quite heavy when it is full of water”. Many of the staff members thought that smaller jugs should be used so that children could pour their own water and children also noted that they would like to be able to serve their own water. As one child said, “I did it once because the teacher was serving someone else and they forgot about me so...” The tables where children sat were long, rectangular tables with foldaway stools attached. One child noted that these were not conducive to children talking together as he stated, “you might hurt your neck if you are sitting next to them, you won’t hurt your neck if you are looking straight”.

The waste area was arranged so that the different waste buckets were in a line and often a bottleneck at the waste area was observed as children distributed their waste, sometimes incorrectly, “sometimes people put cutlery in the waste bin with the waste food”. In addition, rather than scraping their plate, children would often bang their plate on the side of the bin, which could result in mess. In



terms of amount of waste, most staff thought that the amount of waste was appropriate. Mess was an issue for children. At the waste area children reported mess, “and sometimes when I’m pouring my food into the bin when I don’t want any more, someone accidentally spilt their food over me”. Some children also had difficulty using their cutlery, at times, resorting to using their fingers as well as their cutlery. Often children lacked the dexterity or strength in their fingers to use the cutlery appropriately, having difficulty cutting food and spreading butter on their bread.

### *Noise*

Observations of the lunchtime service indicated varying noise levels throughout the service and at times it seemed rather loud. Using a noise monitor the decibel range over two different time points varied between 64 and 79 decibels with a median of 72 decibels. The staff reported that they thought the noise levels were appropriate. However, the majority of children described the noise levels as too high. They described children talking a lot and shouting, “shouting, sometimes they shout because there might be one of their friends, there wasn’t a seat next to your friends so you have to shout across to them”. When asked what they liked least about lunchtime they said, “it’s really noisy” and one child said, “I get a headache from the noise”.

### *Movement*

From observing the lunchtime service it appeared that there was a considerable amount of movement by children. Detailed observation of the Go Pro footage confirmed this. All children spent time swivelling on their stools, turning round to talk with other children and to see what was going on. Children in years 1 and 2 got up to get their cutlery for their main meal and then again to get cutlery for their dessert. Children were shown getting up to scrape their dinner plate and separately getting up to scrape their dessert bowl. Children moved to ask a staff member to help them cut their food, to ask for water, whether they could eat their dessert and whether they could go out to play. They got up to get bread from different tables if there was none left on their table and they got up again to get butter. Overall, there appeared to be constant movement in the dining hall although this was considered appropriate by most staff. As one staff member noted, “the dining hall is a busy place”.

### *Temporal*

Lunchtime usually started at 11.45am and finished by 1.00pm. During this time all children went into lunch class by class. The reception children went to lunch first and then to play and children in years 1 and 2 took it in turns to go in second and third. Children took varying lengths of time to have their lunch and the Go Pro video footage recorded children taking from 17.07 minutes to 36.21 minutes,

including queuing. Some children reported having their lunch quickly so they could go out to play with their friends and others stated that they took their time. Staff also mentioned the length of time some children took to eat their meal and this should be speeded up.

Queuing was an issue for the children, “you have to line up until it’s your..., until the chef asks you what you want”. They reported that queuing was “boring” and “sometimes it takes too long”. Analysis of the Go Pro footage showed that children could take up to a third of their lunchtime queuing. Alongside noise, queuing was the other consistent factor they liked least about the lunchtime service. Observation of the lunchtime service and Go Pro video footage showed that children spent their time in the queue discussing, and often arguing, about where they were going to sit and who they were going to sit with. In addition, children reported that other children often misbehaved in the queue. However, when discussing what they would like to change about the lunchtime service the children were able to articulate ideas to improve the queuing system. Child 1, “I have an idea, um, a group go to lunch, and then another group, then another group, right, so do it in groups”, Child 2, “yes, about six to eight”. Child 1, “right okay. That would be easier wouldn’t it?” Child 2, “yes”.

Most staff thought the children should queue for their lunch. They thought it gave them time to make their meal choices, that it prepared them for secondary school and that it was good for them to learn the skills of waiting and turn-taking. One respondent stated that queuing should be kept to a minimum and used as a social occasion however this did not appear to be happening.

## ***Social***

### *Peer interaction*

Children reported that they could sit wherever they liked and that they could chat with each other at lunchtime. It was one of the aspects they highlighted when asked what they liked about lunchtime, “I like it because in class we are not allowed to chat but then we can chat with whoever we want”. As well as being able to chat with whoever they wanted, they knew they could also talk about whatever they wanted “you can chat about what you did over Christmas, in the holidays or the weekend”. Observation of the video footage supported this with children observed talking about all sorts of topics: the food they were eating, birthdays, holidays, their family and what they were going to do once they went home. However, the video footage also showed children having constant interruptions in their conversations as they frequently got up from the table as reported above.

Most staff also reported that children could sit where they liked although they would help them if they could not choose. Many staff members believed that the lunchtime service was an opportunity for

children to socialise with one another and that it was their time to interact with their friends. Many staff members identified the opportunity for children to sit where they wanted and to socialise as one of their three top aspects of the lunchtime service. Although one member of staff stated that, “I do see the benefit of children choosing where to sit but we do have to be careful some children are sitting near children and not alone”. However, not all staff thought that children should sit where they wanted and socialise, stating that, “the lunchtime service was different to playtime” which was when children should socialise and chat with one another.

#### *Adult-child interaction*

The staff did not sit with children to have lunch; they sat at a separate table, and when asked felt it was not appropriate for them to sit with the children. They gave many reasons why they felt this, including: it was time for children to be together, adults needed time away from the children and adults would inhibit children’s conversations. They saw their role as facilitative: helping children by pouring their water, cutting up their food, making healthy food choices, clearing up mess and role modelling good table manners.

Children were aware of different staff members’ roles and that they were there to help them. As one child stated, “you can go up to them or put your hand up and then they come over or you can go over and say ‘can I have a drink?’ or something”. All children were clear that to get an adult’s attention they had to raise their hand, “you have to put your hand up if you want to speak to them”. However, children stated that talking to adults meant asking for help. Researcher, “can you talk to the adults?” Child, “yes, kind of. They walk around everywhere but they don’t really stop anywhere. They only don’t walk around everywhere if they need to, like, cut someone’s vegetables”. However, there were instances of social interaction between staff and children captured on video footage.

From the discussion with children and observation of the lunchtime service and Go Pro video footage it appeared that the interactions between staff and children resulted in children being highly dependent upon them during the lunchtime service. Children had to ask to members of staff for their choices at the salad/fruit bar, they had to ask for water, to have their food cut, to turn their tray, to scrape their plate, to get bread and to go to play. Both staff and children were aware of this level of dependence and were keen to find ways around this for example, with children pouring their own water which both staff and children suggested.

### ***Food and nutrition***

Most staff reported that they thought children had healthy food choices. When asked about what they thought was good about the lunchtime service they stated: the variety and quality of food, the fact that the food was healthy and that children were not allowed to choose poorly. They stated that children were encouraged to make healthy food choices and staff helped them to do this. Some members of staff were concerned about children having too much pasta and that this choice should be limited. They also thought that children should have more salad options and better access to the salad/fruit bar and more child-friendly vegetarian options.

The children liked the food served at lunchtime, they stated that the chef cooked good food and when asked to identify good aspects of the lunchtime service they stated “eating good food”. Particular food they liked included: chef’s curry, paella, roast and the desserts, especially cake. Many of the children said they could choose what they wanted for lunch but later qualified it by verbalising the rules associated with food choices: “you can’t have some food together”, “you can’t have pasta and potatoes”, “you can’t have pasta and beans” and “you have to have a healthy option”.

They were aware that some children ate differently, “there is somebody in our class that doesn’t, isn’t allowed dairy” and “he gets pictures of people who are like vegetarian and they can’t give it to them”. Despite knowing that some children ate differently for a variety of reasons: health, personal and/or religious beliefs many of the children had worries about food. Some children worried about being allergic to food, especially nuts although they did not have an allergy to nuts. Other children were concerned about the food choices other children made and whether or not they were making healthy food choices, “I’m worried about [child name], he always has pasta or jacket potato”.

Observational data confirmed that the majority of children were making healthy food choices. However, some children were making some food choices which might be considered less healthy for example, dry pasta and sweetcorn. Many children were observed making limited or no choices from the salad/fruit bar or from the cucumber or carrot sticks available on the tables. This was especially true for children in years 1 and 2; if their hands were full with a main plate and dessert bowl they did not take an option from the salad/fruit bar. One area of concern was children who were not having water to drink with their meal. Some children were observed not having water if they were not at their place when the member of staff was pouring water into other children’s cups or if they did not ask for water.

## Changes to the lunchtime service

The following changes were made or rejected for the lunchtime service:

*Table 1: Changes to the lunchtime service*

<b>Change</b>	<b>Who – Action</b>
Jugs and cups to be transparent so that children are able to start being more independent in pour their own water	Chartwells to order jugs and cups
Smaller jugs to be supplied so children can lift them when full	Chartwells to order jugs
Age and size appropriate cutlery on the tables in pots to avoid the children having to go across the dining room to collect and then running with cutlery in their hands.	Chartwells to order cutlery pots for table
Adult cutlery moved to the adult dining table so that children are not able to take these	Chartwells to order cutlery pots for table
Introduction of crockery rather than plastic plates and bowls.	Chartwells to order crockery 9” plates and bowls to remove all melamine for Yr’s 1 and 2
Introduction of trays to be used with plates and bowls	Chartwells to order trays
Looking at providing labels so that the children are able to read what the different options are	Chartwells to organise labels
Plating up the options available so that children are able to see this prior to making choices	Chartwells to plate up options each day and place on a small table outside of the dining room so children can look at before they enter

Putting bread at the end of the counter so that children take this when they take their main meal	Chartwells to organise
The cold counter for salads and fruits to be changed so that it is more accessible to the children for them to be able to look at and take what they need	Chartwells to place a temporary salad bar to be used to evaluate the change. Fridge unit not to be used
Playing music quietly within the dining area to see if this aids reducing noise levels The one constant across group interviews – noise levels are too high	School and Chartwells to discuss and organise music to played during the lunchtime service
Review the queuing and how this is monitored	School to organise
Having a top table or golden table which is where selected children each week get to sit and eat their meal with an adult or friend of their choice	Rejected by school after discussion with staff
TAs to sit with their children and have their lunch to look at social aspects and to try to encourage table manners and children not rushing their meals	Rejected by school after discussion with staff
Self-serving for reception children at the table to avoid the amount of movement	Rejected by school after discussion with staff

### Post-training findings

Overall, both children and staff said they liked the changes to the lunchtime service and thought they had been beneficial. 99% of staff thought the changes to the lunchtime service had been very helpful and 1% though they had been slightly helpful. In particular, staff identified the introduction of the cutlery in pots on the tables, the children being able to pour their own water and the introduction of the fruit and salad bar where children could be more independent and serve themselves as being most beneficial. Children also felt the “lunchtime was better”. They felt they did not move around so much,

they were able to do things for themselves, they felt more grown up and they felt they were being prepared for moving up the school as one child stated “it’s like summer now and we are getting older and we have to do our own thing”.

Post-training findings will now be discussed under the themes identified during the thematic analysis.

## ***Physical***

### *Visibility*

Both children and all staff liked the plated food display outside the dining hall with children referring to it as “the mini buffet”. It enabled smaller children who were unable to see the counter clearly to decide their meal options in advance. It was not only beneficial to the younger children as one child stated, “because if you have bad vision like me and my friend and you need your glasses but you don’t have your glasses on, you can see”. The children also reported that, “if it’s not there we don’t know what’s for lunch”. Staff also reported that it was one of the more helpful changes and enabled children to be independent and they could make decisions more quickly.

The salad/fruit bar was also viewed favourably by children and all staff and was rated one of the most helpful changes by staff. This had now been set out on two tables in the middle of the dining hall and as one child commented, “I think it looks like a restaurant because it’s got a salad bar” and another child added, “other restaurants have a salad bar that you can choose from”. It meant that children could clearly see what was available to them and could help themselves to food thereby being independent in their food choices. As more than one child stated, “I like being able to choose my own food”.

Although problems with visibility of food had been mitigated to some extent by the provision of the plated food choices outside of the dining hall there was still an issue with visibility and eye contact between catering staff and children at the servery. Removing the glass shelf at the servery and raising the level at which children stood were mentioned as further areas for change in the future. There had also been no changes to the waste area and as a consequence children were still observed putting items into incorrect waste containers.

### *Resources*

The reception children still used the compartmentalised trays for their food and, although they served themselves at the salad/fruit bar, they served their cold salad on top of their hot food as there was nowhere else to place it. However, with the cutlery being on the tables rather than the trays, the trays



were lighter to carry. Children in years 1 and 2 liked the introduction of the new crockery referring to it as “proper china”. They also thought the new plates were slightly bigger enabling them to have more food. The introduction of the trays had also been helpful making it easier for them to carry their food, “the trays are helpful because you can carry everything and before it was really hard”. All staff thought the new crockery and trays had been beneficial to the children stating it made the service more like home and there were less spillages.

Children and adults liked the cutlery being on the tables in pots. Adults reported that it made the children more independent, time was saved and they had more time to get on with other things. In addition, they thought there was less movement in the dining hall as children were not getting up to get cutlery. The children also liked the cutlery being on the tables however, they identified a problem in that “the holes (in the pots) are the same size as the cutlery ends”. This sometimes resulted in cutlery getting stuck in the pots and children not being able to get them out. Another issue identified on the video footage showed that as the service was nearing the end there was often not enough cutlery available on the table and children were having to move around looking for cutlery or having to ask for more. Staff commented that all children now had appropriate sized cutlery, however it was still observed that children had dexterity problems when using the cutlery for cutting or spreading butter.

The clear jugs and cups were also viewed favourably and the smaller jugs meant that children could pour their own water. This facilitated children’s independence and many members of staff thought that children were drinking more. This was an observation which was supported via the Go Pro video footage which clearly showed children who had not previously been having water now drinking it. Staff also thought that children pouring their own water saved time and allowed them to get on with other things. The children also liked the clear jugs and glasses, as one child said “sometimes me and my friends pretend it’s glass, we feel like adults” and another said “it makes me feel more grown up”.

There were concerns from adults that children helping themselves to food at the salad/fruit bar and pouring their own water would result in more mess. However, this was not evidenced from the video footage and in fact one adult noted that there was actually reduced mess and spillage as children were taking more care when serving themselves salad or pouring water. As previously noted, children were still using their fingers to eat when it became too difficult to use the cutlery and due to no changes being made at the waste area there were still issues with mess there. Adults highlighted this as an area which needed addressing.

### *Noise*

In an attempt to address the noise issues raised by children, music had been introduced during the lunchtime service. Noise readings taken at two time points during the lunchtime service ranged from 66 to 83 decibels with a median of 74.5 decibels. Therefore, the lowest noise rating was during a lunchtime service prior to the introduction of the music and the highest reading taken during a lunchtime service after the introduction of the music. However, the number of readings was limited and to be valid a greater number of readings would need to be taken over a much longer period of time. Staff were also still experimenting with different types of music and loudness levels and it was noted that further work needed to be completed in this area.

Most children said they liked the music but some said they could not always hear it or that children talked louder because they could not hear their friends talk. As one child stated, “when like the song comes on it’s loud, I can’t even, when like my friends talk to me I’m like, what are they saying?” However, overall, children thought the loudness had not changed with a minority of children thinking it was now quieter. Staff were also mixed in their opinions regarding the introduction of the music with 60% of staff saying it was appropriate with the music and 40% saying it was too loud. Some members of staff thought, that as well as having a favourable impact on noise levels, it made the children more relaxed. However, this was the change identified by staff as being unhelpful.

### *Movement*

Children felt that the overall amount of movement had decreased because the cutlery on the tables meant they did not have to get up to get cutlery and the placement of the salad/fruit bar prevented movement across the dining hall. Staff also thought the amount of movement by children in years 1 and 2 had decreased but movement by reception children had not. Analysis of the Go Pro video footage demonstrated a clear reduction in movement. Previously, children had moved around for a variety of reasons which were no longer applicable. They no longer had to get up to get cutlery, to scrape their plates and then their bowls, they took everything on the one tray, and they poured their own water. Many children were now shown going and sitting at the table for their meal and only getting up at the end to take their tray to the waste area. This was the case for all children, not just children in years 1 and 2, and therefore it is difficult to ascertain why it would be perceived that reception children were moving around more.

## ***Temporal***

The length of the children's lunchtimes captured by the Go Pro video cameras ranged from 16.55 minutes to 26.27 minutes (17.07 minutes to 36.21 minutes pre-training) and, as with the findings from the pre-training footage, up to a third of children's lunchtime was spent queuing. Staff reported that many of the changes had resulted in time being saved and certainly, on average, children were faster having their lunch post-training. However, this was still an issue with children. Again, when asked about what they did not like about the lunchtime service they mentioned queuing, "I don't like lining up" and again they said that children "should go in groups" or "one class at a time". As demonstrated previously, the video footage showed that children spent a considerable amount of time arguing with each other about who was going to sit by whom and where they were going to sit.

## ***Social***

### *Peer interaction*

The video footage showed that as children were not constantly getting up and down from the table they had more time to have longer conversations with each other. As before, children were observed engaging with each other on a range of topics. In addition, children were observed talking to and helping one another with children asking each other to pass cutlery or pour their water.

### *Adult-child interactions*

Previously, prior to the training, the adult role was viewed as facilitative with children constantly asking members of staff for help. After the training 40% of staff stated that their role had changed. They stated that they had less to do so there was more time and freedom to chat with children, have conversations and answer their questions. However, some staff members saw it as a time when children needed to talk with staff less so they had more time to chat with their friends. The children also recognised this stating that "teachers just watch us really". The video footage also supported this and showed staff having minimal interaction with children.

The video footage also showed that as children interacted less with staff they became more independent. As one child said "before the teachers did it and we didn't learn". This was clear to see with some of the changes: children helping themselves to food at the salad/fruit bar, taking their own cutlery and pouring their own water. However, these actions seemed to have a multiplier effect with children also asking members of staff to cut their food less and whether they could scrape their plate. Children could be viewed helping each other to cut their food. As one child said about the changes, "it

makes me feel more grown up” and another added, “it gets us ready for year 2”. Staff also reported that the changes had made children more independent and self-sufficient.

### ***Food and nutrition***

Staff already believed that children had healthy lunchtime choices, but, post-training, 85% of staff thought that the changes to the lunchtime service had encouraged healthier food choices. They thought that as much of the food was more visible and accessible children were trying new food items and taking and eating more salad and fruit. However, there was a concern that children were now taking too much food but the majority still thought that the amount of waste was appropriate. Staff also thought that children were also drinking more now they were able to pour their own water. Children also thought that they were taking more salad and fruit and making healthier food choices although they were aware that some children were still not making healthy choices. In accordance with staff, children thought that some children were taking food items and then not eating them but overall they did not think there was more waste.

The Go Pro video footage supported the views of staff and children. Children were shown taking more items from the salad/fruit bar and especially popular were items such as olives and hard boiled eggs. All children were shown drinking water, including one child who had been shown not drinking water in the video footage prior to the changes to the lunchtime.

## Discussion

Children's school meals and the lunchtime service is an under-researched area (Pike, 2010). This research study was an evaluation of the impact of the pastoral care training in relation to the school lunchtime service delivered to staff in one school. As well as observing the service and incorporating staff views on the lunchtime service, both pre and post training, this research study aimed to involve the child's voice, currently missing from the literature (Hansen, Hansen & Kristensen, 2016), incorporating their perspective within the training and evaluation. The research study had the following two aims:

- To evaluate the impact of pastoral care training on staff involved with planning, delivering and facilitating the school lunchtime service.
- To evaluate the impact of the training on the children's lunchtime experience from the perspective of children and staff.

Data included written narrative observations of the lunchtime service, noise level recordings, questionnaires to teaching and catering staff, focus group interviews with children and videography using portable Go Pro cameras. Analysis of the combined data sets enabled the research aims to be addressed.

Prior to the training the most staff thought that the majority of children made healthy food choices at lunchtime unlike the findings from Nelson et al., (2006) however, as with their findings, staff often supported children when making healthy food choices. Children thought that most children made healthy food choices and were aware there were lots of rules and support available to them to do this. However, a number of children expressed concern regarding those children who they felt did not make healthy food choices. Generally, staff thought that the time taken for the lunchtime service was appropriate however, there was a small number of staff members who felt the service could be faster. According to previous research, this is a finding when the area used for lunchtime dining area is also used for other activities (Dudek, 2005) which it was in this case. Overall, the length of the lunchtime service was in accordance with previous research (Nelson et al., 2006; Rahim et al., 2012) and did not change during the research study.

According to the literature queuing can be of immense frustration to children (Moore et al., 2010). In this study staff felt that the length of time spent queuing was acceptable and gave children time to consider their food choices as well as learn vital skills of waiting and turn-taking which would be beneficial in the future. However, in agreement with the literature, children disliked queuing, spending

up to a third of their time in the dining hall in the queue. In addition, children complained of poor behaviour by other children in the queue and there was evidence that children spent considerable time discussing and arguing about where they were going to sit and who they were going to sit with.

Staff were aware that not being able to see the food available, especially at the salad/fruit bar and for the smallest children was an issue. This was also found in the research by Moore et al (2010) and corroborated by children during the interviews. In addition, when the video footage was viewed it was apparent that children had difficulty viewing the food and this impacted on their food choices. In addition, it was also apparent that there was a problem with visibility at the waste area, an issue highlighted by children but not staff. Other environmental factors discussed in the literature (Stroebele & de Castro, 2004; The Scottish Government, 2014) and commented upon by staff included noise levels, movement in the dining hall and food waste, all of which they felt were appropriate. Some of these findings contrasted with the literature and with children's opinions and/or the video evidence. Dining halls have been described as noisy (Moore et al., 2010) and, in this study, children described the dining environment as too noisy. Video footage demonstrated that there was considerable movement within the dining hall with children constantly getting up and down. This had the unintended consequence of curtailing children's conversations which was a stated aim for the lunchtime service by staff. In addition, the layout of the tables in rows also impacted on the ability of children to converse.

Staff stated that their role was to facilitate the lunchtime service by helping children to cut food and pour their drinks, support children in making healthy food choices and to model appropriate social etiquette and table manners. This role is one that has been articulated in previous research (Lalli, 2018), despite the acknowledged benefits found when adults take a more social role and facilitate a 'pedagogic meal' which enhances social and language development (Degotardi, Torr & Nguyen, 2016; Hallam et al., 2016; Lalli, 2018). Children were in agreement with the adults' stated role and were aware of the rules in place to facilitate this such as putting up their hand to gain a staff member's attention.

The research findings prior to the pastoral care training were incorporated into the training for school and catering staff. This enabled staff to broaden their understanding of the lunchtime service and to see and hear it from the children's perspective. Although staff had identified visibility as an issue in terms of making food choices they had not realised that it impacted upon communication between the children and catering staff. They had also not realised how loud the lunchtime service was and how much children did not like it. They also took note of the amount of movement in the dining hall

and realised the impact this had on peer interaction. They appreciated that queuing was a problem for children and that it was an aspect that needed to be addressed. They also appreciated that whilst they saw their role as facilitative and supportive, this had led to children being too dependent upon them which was not helpful for children's learning.

Incorporating the children's perspective within the training resulted in changes to the lunchtime service which would not have been made otherwise. There were a number of changes relating to the resources used for lunch such as crockery and cutlery. It could be argued that these had previously been selected for convenience rather than any other purpose (Moore et al., 2010; Pike, 2010). Providing smaller and transparent jugs and cups, placing age appropriate cutlery on the tables and providing crockery and trays to carry the crockery enabled a more home-like environment which is considered to be a more beneficial lunchtime experience for children (Pike, 2010). Children being able to pour their own water, take their own cutlery and carry their own plates and bowls increased children's independence and gave staff greater flexibility and freedom to do other things. It also provided a greater learning and social experience for children as they helped one another with these activities.

Supplying food labels, providing plated options for children to view before entering the dining hall, putting bread on the counter and providing an accessible salad/fruit bar had multiple impacts. Overall, it created a more restaurant-like environment which is also associated with a more beneficial lunchtime experience for children (Pike, 2010). Visibility of food was also raised and this resulted in more healthy food choices by most children. It also increased children's independence and the situating of the salad/fruit bar in the middle of the dining hall reduced movement around the hall.

Playing music during the lunchtime service was introduced in response to children's concerns regarding noise levels and as a means to reducing the noise levels during lunchtime. Previous research had indicated that noise levels created a less than positive dining experience for children (Moore et al., 2010) and that playing music had been shown to have an impact on food choices and length of service (Stroebele & de Castro, 2006; North, Shilcock & Hargreaves, 2003). However, it was unknown whether it would impact on noise levels. The research findings for this have been inconclusive from both children and staff. Recordings were taken on a variety of days and times pre and post training, however, for comparative purposes, only two time points over two days taken pre and post training could be compared. In addition, the type of music which was considered most suitable was still being investigated. Therefore, further research in this area is warranted with more timings being taken once suitable music is selected.



Reviewing and monitoring the queuing system was not conducted at the time of the research. However, previous research, which has analysed and changed various environmental factors, including the queuing system, has demonstrated that introducing a new queueing system which reduces the time spent in line has the potential to aid learning in class (Golley et al., 2010). Therefore, due to the fact that the current queuing system is viewed negatively by children and results in argument between children, this should be addressed as the school and catering staff develop the lunchtime service.

Three changes were considered and rejected by school staff. The first change was the provision of a top or 'golden' table for children where each week selected children could sit with a member of staff or with their friends at a separate table to have their meal. This was considered unfeasible to implement by school staff for logistical and organisational reasons and it was unclear what the benefits to the children or lunchtime service might be. Anecdotal evidence indicates that in schools where this occurs it is helpful and encourages positive behaviour from children however, there appears to be no research evidence to support this.

The second change was for teaching assistants to sit with the children at lunchtime in order to encourage socialisation and to act as role models. This is the idea underpinning the concept of the 'pedagogic meal' (Lalli, 2018) and the value of this approach is supported by research evidence (Degotardi, Torr & Nguyen, 2016; Hallam et al., 2016). However, teaching staff felt that it was inappropriate citing reasons such as: adults need a break, it stops children's conversations and adult conversation is inappropriate for children. However, some members of staff recognised benefits such as adults modelling appropriate behaviour. Staff had stated that they thought one of their roles was to act as a role model for social etiquette and table manners and it is difficult to see how this could be achieved without sitting down and eating with children. In addition, it was noted that with children being more independent, staff engaged in even less interactions with children although there is now opportunity to engage with children in more social interactions.

The final change suggested and rejected was that of reception children serving themselves at the table to avoid movement. This was rejected for a variety of reasons such as: children will make a mess, it would take too long, children would not make healthy food choices and it would slow down service. Whilst some of the suggestions may be justified, children demonstrated that they could be careful and not make a mess when serving themselves at the salad/fruit bar and pouring their own water. It could also be argued that if the suggestions regarding staff members sitting with children were accepted, this would mitigate many, if not all, of the reasons cited for rejecting children serving themselves. In

addition, it would stop the perception and/or reality of reception children moving around the dining hall too much.

There were a number of proposed changes which had not yet been implemented including: the design team building a ramp and removing the glass shelf at the servery so that children could see the food choices and engage in eye contact during communication with catering staff. The school introducing name plates for the children to encourage them to sit with different children. It is envisaged that this might reduce the amount of discussion and number of arguments regarding seating arrangements when children are queuing. However, this might have a negative impact on socialisation if children are located next to children they do not know or get on with. It is suggested that this should be monitored carefully. The design team changing the seating arrangements to round tables, to use chairs with seats low enough for children to place their feet on the floor and with a back support. Previous research has demonstrated that when younger children are introduced to this type of seating it reduces excessive movement and encourages children to stay at the table (McInnes, 2018). The design team redesigning the waste area to aid visibility and organisation. This change should be carefully monitored including taking before and after measures of the amount of waste generated.

Further issues identified by the research study which warrant further consideration by the school and catering staff are the use of the compartmentalised trays used by reception children. As previously noted there were occasions when dessert items were spilled on the main meal and salad items were served on top of the hot food neither of which are conducive to enjoyable or healthy eating. In addition, looking at the cutlery options or teaching children to use cutlery and cut their food may be advantageous for developing fine motor skills and ultimately the skills necessary for writing (Suggate, Pufke & Stoeger, 2018) and would also reduce the mess generated by children using their fingers to eat. If it was decided to keep the current cutlery, consideration should be given to the containers in which the cutlery is kept as children stated that cutlery got stuck in the holes of the containers. Investing in the lunchtime environment and its resources is necessary to optimise the lunchtime experience (Moore et al., 2010) and these may be a worthwhile investments to make. No changes were suggested to the actual food choices available to children. However, based on comments by staff and children further scrutiny of the menu should be undertaken to include more salad and child-friendly vegetarian options. There might also be consideration regarding the availability of pasta on the menu.

The voices of children have largely been absent from the limited research conducted on school lunchtime services (Hansen, Hansen & Kristensen, 2016) and this research study begins to address this

omission. The research study used focus group interviews with children across reception and years 1 and 2. In addition, videography using portable Go Pro cameras were used with a sample of four children, two from reception and two from year 2. The methods allowed children's voices to be heard and the perspective to be seen and both were used to inform the training delivered to staff. It was apparent that the staff learned from the children and some changes to the lunchtime service were implemented which would not otherwise have occurred.

There were ethical issues which needed to be addressed in terms of consent, assent from children and management regarding who was chosen to be in the focus groups and who wore the cameras. Detailed information and consent forms were provided for parents and ongoing assent was monitored by the research team, school and catering staff. Parameters for inclusion in the research was provided for school staff by the research team and selection of children was managed sensitively by school staff. All queries raised by children relating to the research were answered although these were few. There are many advantages and disadvantages to using videography as a methodological tool such as providing a real world view, the ability to revisit in the present as well as being time consuming to observe, transcribe and analyse (Jewitt, 2012). However, for the purposes of this research and contributing to the pastoral care training package to improve the lunchtime service it has been effective.

### **Limitations of the study**

Methodological limitations of the research study were that this was a small scale study taking place in one school. In addition, the school was an independent school with a limited demographic. Both these factors reduce the generalisability of the findings. There was a problem with monitoring the noise levels pre and post training. More recordings were taken pre training compared to post training both in terms of the number of days recordings were made and the number of times recordings were taken. As result only two time recordings on two days could be used for comparative purposes and it is suggested that these could be too few for a meaningful comparison. In addition, although the music was introduced during the lunchtime service, the school was still at the stage of experimenting with types of music and noise levels of the music. It is suggested that further research should take place on this aspect of the lunchtime service once suitable music and appropriate noise levels have been finalised.

This was an evaluative research study taking at two points during the school year. The first time point was at the beginning of the spring term and the second time point was in the middle of the summer term. It is possible that some of the changes in development noted such as increased independence by children and being quicker to have their lunch could have been due to maturational changes in the children during this time period. However, it could be argued that many of the changes were designed to increase children's independence and therefore this was not solely due to maturational changes.

The Go Pro cameras were fitted at high chest height rather than head height and it could be argued they did not provide a true picture of the child's lunchtime experience. However, it was felt that wearing cameras at head height would be uncomfortable and potentially interfere with children's eating. This was deemed unethical and therefore the chest height option was selected. It was felt that the video footage provided a sufficiently accurate view of the child's perspective and was therefore meaningful. In addition, the findings were supported by children's comments and thereby increasing the validity of the data.

### **Future research and recommendations**

This research study evaluated the pastoral care training relating to school mealtimes in one school as well as the inclusion of the child's voice within the research process. As a result of the training various changes were made to the lunchtime service and their impact evaluated. Areas of evaluation included: children's behaviour, children's interactions with both peers and adults and children's independence. This research did not evaluate the impact of the changes on children's learning after lunch nor on academic performance as has been conducted in other studies (Anderson, Gallagher & Ramirez Ritchie, 2017; Golley et al., 2010). This might be an area worthy of further research.

Although further research of the music introduced during the lunchtime service and its impact on noise levels needs to be conducted in the setting, this might be an area for future research. Although, there is research looking at the impact of music in restaurant settings (North, Shilcock & Hargreaves, 2003), there does not appear to be much research conducted on this in school settings. Recommendations to further improve the lunchtime service include:

- monitoring and evaluating the current queuing system and implementing a new one more appropriate to the needs of children
- considering the introduction of the concept and practice of the 'pedagogic meal'
- monitoring planned changes to the seating arrangements

- considering introducing different crockery for the children in reception classes
- considering changes to the cutlery for all children or introducing training for children in the use of cutlery and cutting skills
- introducing a ramp at the servery and removing the glass shelf so that eye contact can be gained between children and staff
- introducing name plates to facilitate seating arrangements
- redesigning the waste area.

## Conclusion

This funded research study evaluated the impact of bespoke pastoral care training, which included the child's voice, on school mealtimes delivered by Norland Consultancy for Chartwells Compass Group. Using a mixed methods approach, this training has involved the voices and views of children and has resulted in a number of positive changes to the lunchtime service in the study setting. The research study has successfully met its aims which adds to the research literature on school meals, especially research involving children's voices. There are a number of limitations to the study and further changes which need to be made to the lunchtime service which will need to be monitored. In addition, it is suggested that further changes should be considered. This would result in greater social learning by children and would be beneficial to their development.

It is apparent that the evaluation of the pastoral care training has demonstrated its importance in upholding the principles of Chartwells-Compass Group. Great food is being cooked and children have, and are choosing, healthy meal options. A sense of community is invoked as Chartwells are fully involved with the school teams with which they work. Funding this research and acting upon the findings from the evaluation is innovative and results in new ideas being incorporated into their service and they cater to the needs of each school. These findings are applicable to the school in which the research was conducted but may not be applicable to a different school, with different staff, children and needs. Therefore, further research with different schools and settings is recommended to fully explore the impact of the pastoral care training and subsequent changes made to the lunchtime service in schools.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Pre-training questionnaire

**This research study is evaluating the impact of the pastoral care training delivered by Norland College on the lunchtime service at Chigwell School. You will be asked to complete a questionnaire before delivery of the training and after delivery of the training alongside any changes made to the lunchtime service. By completing this questionnaire you are consenting to take part in the research. Any information you supply which is used in subsequent reports, articles and presentations will be anonymised and will not be attributable to you.**

#### Personal information

What is your name:

What is your role:

How long have you worked at Chigwell school:

What age group do you work with – YR, Y1, Y2, All

#### Lunchtime service

When do you think children should eat their lunch?

Before play

After play

Why?

Should children queue for their lunch?

Yes

No

Why?

When children arrive at the servery, how do they make their food choices?

Do you think they can see the food? Yes/no.

Do you think they can reach the food? Yes/no.

Do you think they should serve their own food? Yes/no/why?

Do you think they should choose their own cutlery and crockery? Yes/no/why?

Do you think that children's food choices are generally healthy? Yes/no

What could be done, if anything, to make their food choices healthier?

Do children choose where to sit for their lunch? Yes/no

If no, should they be able to choose?

How do adults support children during the lunchtime service?

Why do you think adults should interact with children during the lunchtime service? (Tick all that apply)

- To respond to requests for help.
- To help them make food choices.
- To help them make other choices.
- To give them permission to do something else
- To engage in conversation about food.
- To engage in general conversation.
- To facilitate interactions with other children.
- To support appropriate behaviour.
- To support children's language development.
- Other.

Should adults sit with children during the lunchtime service? Yes/no  
Why?

What do you think of the noise level at lunchtime?

- Too low
- Too high
- Appropriate
- If too high what do you think could be done to lower the noise levels?

What do you think about the amount of children's movement during the lunchtime service?

- Appropriate
- Too much
- If too much what could be done to reduce the amount of movement during the lunchtime service?

What do you think about the amount of food wastage at lunchtime?

- Appropriate
- Too much
- If too much what do you think could be done to reduce the amount of food wastage?

#### General

Please identify three good aspects of the lunchtime service.

Please identify three things you would like to change about the lunchtime service?

Do you have any further comments about the lunchtime service?

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Your responses will be treated anonymously and any comments used in publications will be anonymized.**

## Appendix B- post-training questionnaire

**This research study is evaluating the impact of the pastoral care training delivered by Norland College on the lunchtime service at Chigwell School. You completed a questionnaire before delivery of the training and this is a questionnaire post-delivery of the training to evaluate the changes to the lunchtime service. By completing this questionnaire you are consenting to take part in the research. Any information you supply which is used in subsequent reports, articles and presentations will be anonymised and will not be attributable to you.**

### Personal information

What is your name?

What is your role?

### Lunchtime service

Has the lunchtime display table outside the dining hall been helpful to children?

Yes

No

Why?

Has the placement of the fruit/salad bar in the hall been helpful?

Yes

No

Why?

Has this encouraged children to choose more food?

Yes

No

Why?

Has this encouraged healthier food choices by children?

Yes

No

Why?

Has the introduction of music been helpful?

Yes

No

Why?

What do you now think of the noise level at lunchtime?

Too high

Appropriate

If too high what do you think could be done to lower the noise levels?

Has the introduction of cutlery pots on the table been helpful?

Yes

No

Why?

Has children being able to pour their own water been helpful?

Yes  
No  
Why?

Has the introduction of crockery for years 1 and 2 been helpful?

Yes  
No  
Why?

What do you now think about the amount of children's movement during the lunchtime service?

Appropriate  
Too much

If too much what could be done to reduce the amount of movement during the lunchtime service?

What do you think about the amount of food wastage at lunchtime?

Appropriate  
Too much

If too much what do you think could be done to reduce the amount of food wastage?

Have the changes affected your role?

Yes  
No  
How?

Have there been changes in how you interact with the children?

Yes  
No  
Explain

General

Overall what do you think about the changes to the lunchtime service?

Very helpful  
Slightly helpful  
Neither helpful or unhelpful  
Slightly unhelpful  
Very unhelpful

Please identify the changes you think have been most helpful and why

Please identify any changes you think have been unhelpful and why

Please identify any further changes you feel could benefit the lunchtime service

Do you have any further comments about the lunchtime service?

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Your responses will be treated anonymously and any comments used in publications will be anonymized.**

## **Appendix C – Pre-training focus group interview schedule**

### **Interview schedule for focus group interviews – pre-training**

I would like to talk with you about what happens at lunchtimes in school. I am going to ask a few questions and you can tell me what you think. Our chat is going to be video recorded – are you happy to be video recorded (confirm and record each child saying yes).

#### Questions

- Q1. What happens when you first come into the dining hall?
- Q2. What do you think about queuing? Why?
- Q3. What happens at the servery? Can you see the food? Can you/how do you see the food? How do you know what to choose to eat? How do the adults help you?
- Q4. Do you like the food choices you have? What is your favourite food? What is your least favourite food? Do you think you eat healthily? Why?
- Q5. What do you think of the plates, cups and cutlery? Do you get to choose your own plate, cup and cutlery? If not, would you like to?
- Q6. Where do you sit for your lunch? How do you know where to sit? Can you choose where you sit and who you sit with?
- Q7. What are the rules about talking at lunchtime? What do you think about the noise at lunchtime?
- Q8. What do the adults do at lunchtime? If you want to get the adults attention what do you do? What do you talk to the adults about at lunchtime?
- Q9. What happens at the end of lunchtime?
- Q10. When is it best to have your play at lunchtime? Why?
- Q11. How does lunchtime make you feel? Why?
- Q12. What do you like most about lunchtime?
- Q13. What do you like least about lunchtime?
- Q14. If you could make one change at lunchtime what would it be and why?
- Q15. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about lunchtimes?

## Appendix D – Post-training focus group questionnaire

### Interview schedule for focus group interviews – post-training

I would like to talk with you about all the changes that have been made at lunchtimes in school. I am going to ask a few questions and you can tell me what you think. Our chat is going to be video recorded – are you happy to be video recorded (confirm and record each child saying yes).

#### Questions

- Q1. What do you think about the display before you come into the dining hall? Do you look at it? Does it help you choose what you are going to eat?
- Q2. Has anything changed with queuing? What?
- Q3. What happens at the servery? Can you see the food better? Is it easier to choose what to eat? How do the adults help you?
- Q4. What do you think about the salad/fruit bar being moved? Is it easier to choose food from the salad/fruit bar? Do you think more children use it? Do you like the food choices you have? Do you think it is easier for you to eat healthily? Why?
- Q5. What do you think about having the knives and forks on the table? Is it easier for you?
- Q6. What do you think about being able to pour your own water? Is it easier/harder? Do you help each other?
- Q7. What do you think about having proper plates and bowls? Is it easier or harder? (Yrs 1 and 2 only)
- Q8. What do you think about the music at lunchtime? Do you like it? What music do you like? Is there other music you would like to hear?
- Q9. What do you think about the noise at lunchtime? Has it changed? Too noisy or okay?
- Q10. What do you think about children moving around in the dining hall? Has it changed? Too much or okay?
- Q11. Do the adults do anything differently at lunchtime?
- Q12. What do you think about all the changes? Is lunchtime better or worse?
- Q13. How does lunchtime make you feel? Why?
- Q14. What do you like most about lunchtime?
- Q15. What do you like least about lunchtime?
- Q16. Are there any other changes you think should be made?
- Q17. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about lunchtimes?



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