

How to ...

create calm dining halls

Foreword by Jeanette Orrey MBE – inspiration behind Jamie Oliver's food campaign



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Case studies

A true lunchtime experience that made me want to cry!
A lunchtime experience that made me want to sing and dance!
Another lunchtime experience to shout about from dining hall rooftops!

What have we learnt from the case studies?

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A note to end on

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Useful organisations

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Appendix 1

Photocopiable dining hall questionnaires

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Appendix 2

Photocopiable dining hall resources

Chapter 2

Why do you need this book?

“Inspectors must ensure that they observe pupils in a range of situations outside normal lessons to evaluate other aspects of personal development, behaviour and welfare, for example ... during lunchtime, including in the dining hall, and break or play times ...” (Ofsted, 2015).

You need this book if the children in your dining hall are not happy and calm.

You need this book if:

- Any of the previous scenarios touch a nerve.
- The children in your dining hall are not happy and calm.
- Children experience high levels of noise, unfairness, shouting, long queues, pushing in the lines, poor food and a sense of rush which then hypes them up into a really anxious, cross or withdrawn state.
- You want to promote the social skills associated with dining with others.
- You would like to offer the social experiences of collecting and eating food whilst engaging with others in a positive way.
- You are really keen for the children and staff in your school to enjoy sociable, enjoyable lunchtimes.
- You want your children to be focused, calm, happy and ready to learn after their lunchtime.

“Improving the dining environment and the nutritional quality of the food over a twelve week period positively impacted upon learning-related behaviours in children” (School Food Trust, 2009).

What does research tell us?

Research in the last few years has shown a positive link between improving the dining experience and positive learning behaviour. One study, by the School Food Trust (2009) – now the Children’s Food Trust – found that “improving the dining environment and the nutritional quality of the food over a twelve week period positively impacted upon learning-related behaviours in children.” After the intervention, researchers found that in the afternoons, pupils were “over three times more likely to be ‘on-task’ working and were more alert.”

Trigger questions for catering staff and midday supervisors

- Are you happy with the “look” of the dining hall?
- Do you find the queues are too long?
- Are you ever given a chance to be creative with food?
- How do you find the time to make things extra special in the dining hall?
- Are you aware of any themes of the term that you might be able to tie in with your own ideas?
- Do you think the children speak respectfully to you – with please and thank you?
- Are there Dining Hall Rules up in the dining hall?
- Do you know what the Dining Hall Rules are off by heart?
- Do you have meetings with your headteacher?
- Are you invited to any school events?
- What are noise levels like in the dining hall?
- Does the noise in the dining hall stop you from hearing the children’s voices?
- What do you do when it gets too loud and noisy and when somebody needs to make an announcement?
- Have you ever been encouraged to use the “hands up” approach to ask for quiet?
- Do you think the children know their choices when they enter the hall and can they all make their choices easily (even the youngest)?
- Are you given any rewards, incentives or stickers to hand out to the children?
- How do you help slow eaters?
- Do you have a slow eaters table that they can go on to finish their meal?
- Do you have any system for how children should leave the dining hall – do they put their hand up for you to check their plate or lunch box?
- Is there a lot of mess on and under the tables?
- Do you have a system for scraping the plates and does it work well?

- Have you tried a “Golden Table of the Week” for children who keep the Dining Hall Rules?
- Do you ever have meetings with the other caterers, dining hall staff and yourself?
- Have you ever been invited to assemblies about the dining hall and how to make it happier?
- Do you have regular meetings with the catering team and senior managers together about the dining hall?
- How do you motivate your staff team?
- Do children ever complain to you about anything to do with the dining hall and food?
- Do you have a chance to speak to teachers about the children and their behaviour or eating?
- If you’re ever worried about a child not eating who do you take this worry to?
- How do you find out about children’s special dietary needs or issues – is it by talking to their teacher?
- What have you put in place recently that works well?
- Anything else about lunchtimes?

Trigger questions for pupils who have school meals

- Do you like the school meals at your school?
- Do you always get the choices that you want?
- When you choose your meal in the morning, do you understand what the choices are?
- Are you happy with where you sit for lunch?
- Has a grown-up ever sat at your table to eat with you?
- When you've finished your food do you put your hand up to wait for someone to check your plate?
- If you are waiting for a midday supervisor does he/she come quickly?
- Do you always finish your food?
- Do you scrape your plate yourself, or does someone else do it for you?
- Is there usually a lot of mess on or under your table?
- Is the noise all right, or is it too loud in the dining hall?
- How does it make you feel if noise in the dining hall is too loud?
- Do you queue for too long to get your food?
- Do you ever have stickers or anything for trying new food or for being quiet and tidy?
- Have you ever been on a Golden Table of the Week?
- If people are naughty at lunchtimes what happens?
- Can you tell us anything else about lunchtimes?

Younger children can be asked the questions during a Circle Time and their responses written down by someone.

Chapter 9

Dining Hall Helpers

Dining Hall Helpers and their roles

Some schools ask older pupils if they would like to help in the dining hall.



Children can pick up an application form and apply for the role they would most like to work in.

Some schools ask older pupils if they would like to help in the dining hall and these would be called Dining Hall Helpers. To increase the status of their position, it is a good idea to take a fairly formal approach to recruitment. Schools often create a job description, which is posted up, listing the tasks involved in the role. Children can pick up an application form and apply for the role or prospective helpers are invited to apply for a position as a Dining Hall Helper. Application forms are signed by parents/carers and teachers. In some schools children are interviewed too. Dining Hall Helper tasks can be decided by lunchtime staff and how your dining hall is organised. Here are some ideas:

- Preparing the tables. This might include laying a table with a cloth, cutlery, glasses and water.
- Helping diners, especially younger children with their meal choices.
- Helping to seat diners, especially younger children, and helping to cut up their food or showing them how to do it.
- Serving salad or other cold choices (Health and Hygiene rules apply).
- Refilling water jugs throughout the meal times.
- Walking around the dining hall and asking diners to pick up dropped items and clear away rubbish before they leave the dining hall.
- Helping diners, especially younger children, to clear away their cutlery.
- Being available to run errands and carry out jobs for lunchtime staff.
- Don't forget to ask the caterers too what job they would like help with.
- Having special Dining Hall Helper aprons/tabards and hats

A "Certificate of Appreciation" ... should be awarded once the Dining Hall Helpers have finished their duty period.



would make the Dining Hall Helpers clearly visable in the dining hall.

Incentives for Dining Hall Helpers

Dining Hall Helpers are often offered something in return for carrying out their tasks. This might be free meals or other privileges and parents/carers will need to be kept informed. In many schools, teachers claim that just having the privilege of the role and wearing a Dining Hall Helper uniform – such as an apron and hat/hairnet, like the catering staff – boosts a child's self-esteem and they don't need any extra incentive. Whatever your school decides to offer, it should confer status to the student helpers so that other children see the role as important.

To enable as many children as possible to experience the role of helper, the duration of their work experience can be limited to a half term. A "Certificate of Appreciation" signed by the caterers and lunchtime staff should be awarded once the Dining Hall Helpers have finished their duty period. You can also use the "award" as an incentive to help a child towards being responsible in a school setting. This could be especially important for those children with low self-esteem or who have social and emotional difficulties.

It is a good idea to get a senior school manager to meet with the Dining Hall Helpers for just five minutes a week to ask them how their job is going.

Training Dining Hall Helpers

Dining Hall Helpers need to be trained for the role that they will be playing and be invited to appropriate meetings.

Dining Hall Helpers need to be trained for the role that they will be playing and be invited to appropriate meetings. Incentives for them include, being thanked in assembly, going to meetings and having a "thank you" certificate.

Do see in the Case Studies section, Kew Riverside Primary School – they have written up about their fantastic "Lunchtime Helpers"!

*Uniforms can make
Dining Hall Helpers
clearly visible in the
dining hall.*

Ways forward

- Some schools ask older pupils if they would like to be a Dining Hall Helper in the dining hall.
- Pupils can apply for a Dining Hall Helper position by completing an application form and sometimes having an interview with staff.
- Uniforms will make Dining Hall Helpers clearly visible in the dining hall.
- Dining Hall Helpers will benefit from training so that they know what to do and they can be invited to appropriate meetings.
- Think about the incentives for Dining Hall Helpers which could include a “thank you” in the form of an acknowledgment in front of the school, a certificate or a complimentary lunch.