

# Derby school makes the grade on tougher 2008 school meal standards



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**A Derby school is already making the grade for serving meals that will pass the most stringent of the Government's school meal standards, two years ahead of the regulation being introduced. Yesterday the first of the Government's food-based standards on school meals came into force.**

Nightingale Infant School, based in Osmaston, is opted out of Local Authority control for catering, but is proving that it can meet the onerous task of balancing its lunches to comply with the Government's 14 nutrient-based standards which are due to come into force in primary schools in September 2008\*.

The school has been aided by a menu planning service that has been specifically devised for schools to analyse the meals served to ensure they meet the stipulated proportion of nutrients such as carbohydrate, sugar, sodium (salt) as well as certain vitamins and minerals.

The meals have to contain a minimum of some valuable nutrients – protein, some vitamins and minerals and fibre and a maximum level of other nutrients that children tend to eat too much of – salt, sugar and saturated fat.

**Head Teacher Janet Toombs** has already made great strides in improving the lunchtime menus for both the 165 pupils at the infant school, and the 250 pupils at the affiliated junior school. However she started using the new web-based menu planner, the brainchild of Sheffield-based catering software specialist, **Fretwell-Downing Hospitality**, to ensure the school stayed at the top of the class.

**Mrs Toombs** comments: *"We already have successfully introduced an extremely varied menu which includes plenty of fruit and vegetables. While we felt confident we could meet this September's nine food-based standards, we were facing a dilemma as to how we could prove we were meeting the nutrient standards – for instance, showing that calcium levels are not less than 40% of the recommended nutrient intake.*

*continued....*

*"The menu planning service has taken away much of the head-scratching especially as we are not nutrition experts. Because it also costs out the menus we can see at-a-glance that they will be nutritionally-balanced and within budget.*

*"When we ran the analysis on the meals that we serve every half term we found we only marginally failed to meet the standards for carbohydrate and calorie intakes, and it was then a fairly simple matter to rectify the menus accordingly."*

**Independent dietician Luci Daniels** who advises schools on their dietary needs, explained:

*"Schools are facing a real challenge to comply with the nutrient standards that the education department has introduced, and should start planning and reviewing their menus well ahead of the 2008 deadline as it can take some time to adjust them to meet the standards.*

*"For example, the standards specify a maximum intake of non-milk extrinsic sugars which will lead to changes in the desserts that caterers can offer, meaning recipes will need adapting. Calcium levels may be hard to meet without the daily inclusion of cheese or a milk-based dessert or custard, and the iron and zinc standards can be especially difficult to meet."*

\* On the 19th May 2006, the Government published new school meal standards, which will require schools to meet 9 food-based standards by this September. Primary schools will then need to meet more stringent nutrient-based standards stipulating the essential nutrients, minerals and vitamins for school meals by September 2008, with secondary schools following in 2009.



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