

Food Standards Agency publishes final report on School Food Standards compliance pilot

The report is part of a joint project by the FSA and Department for Education, working with several local authorities in England. The aim of the pilot was to test if Food Safety Officers carrying out food hygiene inspections could ask questions and make observations about food preparation or service areas to identify potential instances of non-compliance with School Food Standards. It also considered whether local authorities were able to support schools to make improvements in areas of potential non-compliance.

Professor Susan Jebb, Food Standards Agency Chair, said:

Since the School Food Standards were introduced, there have been concerns about implementation. The results of the pilot show that food safety officers can conduct additional School Food Standards checks alongside food hygiene inspections to provide valuable insights. However, local authorities face challenges in following up any potential areas of non-compliance identified during the inspections.

This pilot is a step in the right direction, but the report identifies challenges in relation to communication and accountability for adherence to the school food standards. More work is needed, if action is to happen to enable improvement; for example, it was not always clear to food safety officers during the pilot who they should share the outcome of the check with, and who was expected to take action. Pressures on local authority resources mean they are limited in how they can assist schools to resolve issues of non-compliance.

The FSA wants to support efforts to make the food provided in schools healthier and ensure the School Food Standards are met by all schools, as part of wider Government efforts to make sure the school food system can deliver safe and healthy food for our children.'

The results showed food safety officers could conduct checks of the standards alongside food hygiene inspections, although some pressures on their workload were reported. Schools reported they were happy to facilitate the checks which, in some cases, prompted them to review their school food provision. When following up with schools where potential non-compliance was found as part of the checks, the report found that this process was successful when school staff were supportive and engaged, or when local authorities had the capacity and capability to provide substantial support, but this was not always the case.

The pilot showed there could be inconsistencies in applying the checks, for example, when applying definitions of particular foods such as 'meat products'. Issues were also raised about communication between local authorities, schools and caterers, particularly when trying to address potential non-compliance with the standards.

Recommendations included creating a standardised follow-up process following instances of potential non-compliance. This would not prescribe exactly how follow-up should happen locally, but provide the kind of outcomes that should be targeted. This could leave some flexibility to adapt local approaches to match existing models and structures.

About the pilot

The pilot launched across multiple local authorities in September 2022. Participating local authorities included Blackpool Council, Lincolnshire County Council, City of Lincoln Council, Plymouth City Council, Nottingham City Council, Royal Borough of Greenwich, Derbyshire County Council, Derbyshire Dales District Council, City of Wolverhampton Council, Oldham Council, Herefordshire Council, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, Telford and Wrekin Council, Newham Council, Chelmsford City Council, South Tyneside Council, Peterborough City Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.

This is the final of three reports linked to the pilot, which also include a Discovery and Feasibility Phase 1 report. Feasibility Phase 2 was intended to research the feasibility of the pilot between February 2023 and July 2023, after changes were made to the question set, online form, and guidance following Feasibility Phase 1.

This report is available in the [research section](#) of the FSA website.