

Minutes: Virtual Academy Council Meeting 22 October 2020

Present: the five members of the Solebay Academy Council; Janet Baker; headteacher; Pauline Wallace, Paradigm link director for Solebay Primary Academy; Paul Fairclough, Chartwells Regional Manager [tbc]; various parents.

Agenda: To discuss the quality of the food provided by Chartwells to the pupils of Solebay following complaints made regularly by parents and pupils regarding the taste, edibility, suitability and nutritional value of the food since Chartwells took over the contract.

Beth Hale, chair of the Academy Council, outlined the issues, focusing specifically on complaints from pupils that lunches were often arriving in classrooms cold, that too much of the food was spicy (mashed potato being a particular offender) and on the lack of variety. It was noted that a large amount of the menu appeared to consist of 'junk food' or 'fast food', with pizza, burgers, fish fingers and sausages and chips seemingly being served every week. Some children had also complained that coleslaw had been slathered onto food on a regular basis, making it unpleasant to eat. Meanwhile, the parents at the meeting observed that their children were often coming home hungry.

Paul responded by saying that lockdown, and the need to work in socially distanced environments, had presented the company with big logistical challenges but they were working hard to overcome them. He pointed out it was harder to keep the food warm for pupils given it had to be transported to them in their classrooms. He said that the company worked closely with local suppliers and farmers to ensure the quality and freshness of the ingredients. He pointed out that some of the menu had been designed specifically in response to feedback from children with regard to the food they liked to eat. He also said the company prided itself on making food nutritious where possible and that brownies made with sweet potato was a particularly popular example.

Further observations were made in response to Paul's comments, by members of the Council and parents in attendance. It was agreed that adding spice to food, while familiar to some children, was not likely to appeal to all and the company agreed to look at this. The point was made again that the nutritional value of the food appeared to be disappointing, and that it wasn't so much the freshness of the ingredients that appeared to be the problem but the quality of the food produced in the kitchen. It was also observed that the school had a duty of care to provide nutritious meals to its pupils given the large number of pupils from low-income families.

The meeting ended with Chartwells acknowledging the complaints, and stating their intention to address them. It was suggested the company start producing menus so that parents could see what their children were being served for lunch, and that they arrange taster menus for parents once social distancing allowed.