

Children's Parliament **"It's time for something new."**

A consultation on School Food and Drink
May 2018



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Penicuik High School, Midlothian
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About the consultation

The Scottish Government is currently undertaking a process to amend the Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2008, which set the minimum required nutritional standards for the food and drink that children and young people are served throughout the school day. In addition to engagement with adult stakeholders, the Scottish Government commissioned Children's Parliament to facilitate workshops with children and young people in order to explore their views on the food and drinks provided in school.

Along with the duty placed on Ministers and public bodies in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 to consult with children and young people, it is also good practice to ensure that children are actively involved in planning and decision making at a national level. This is especially important when legislation bears a direct impact on their lives, as will these changes to the regulations for school food and drink. This report will help ensure that the voices of children are reflected in the strategic and legislative developments taken forward by Scottish Government which aim to improve children's lives at school and their health and wellbeing.

Children's Parliament uses the creative arts to help children explore their lives and the world around them. We facilitated workshops with small groups of children from P1 to S4 that included a number of individual and small group creative activities and discussions. Each group worked with two facilitators to explore their views and experiences of school food and drink.

The consultation workshops involved a total of 236 Members of Children's Parliament (MCPs)¹ between the ages of 5 and 16 years old. 121 boys and 115 girls took part in this consultation. We worked in seven settings – five primary schools and two secondary schools in the following local authorities: Edinburgh, Glasgow, Midlothian, Aberdeen, Highland, the Western Isles and the Scottish Borders. These areas were selected to ensure that children living in urban, rural and remote locations were included. We sought to work with children from diverse backgrounds, experiences and abilities so that a range of views would be reflected in this report.

In addition to the workshops, an online survey about school food was facilitated with 201 children and young people between P4 and S6 from six of the schools.

The quotes and artwork in this report come directly from the children.



¹All children who participate in our projects and consultations become Members of Children's Parliament. Unlike other parliamentary bodies, Children's Parliament is not an elected body. Rather it is a participatory one, engaging with children across a range of settings in order to include as many children as possible.

A Right to Food

Children's human rights as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) underpin all our work at Children's Parliament. Children's rights are about ensuring that children are healthy, happy and safe and that their views and experiences are listened to and taken seriously. Children feel it is especially important for children and adults to be aware of children's rights so that children can live free from harm and are able to thrive.

"Children's rights are the rights children have, like the right to have a good home, good food and a good community to live in." MCP, P7

At Children's Parliament, children often frame their understanding of children's rights around the concept of "fairness". Children feel strongly about ensuring all children have equal opportunities to grow up in a happy, healthy and safe environment and to have their human dignity respected.

We begin every workshop with an introduction to children's rights to provide a context for the overarching theme of the consultation. Children are aware that although children have a right to food, *"not all children in Scotland have enough food"* MCP, P6. Children recognise that the food children receive at school plays a vital role in ensuring children have enough to eat and that they are ready to take part in the school day. Children particularly highlight the importance of food in ensuring children have their right to *"grow, develop and survive"* MCP, P6.

"We went to a private school for a day recently and we got really good school lunches. It was free! You get macaroni with broccoli and you could have fruit, ice cream and a drink too. It was delicious. I think we should all get the same opportunities to have good food at school, like private schools." MCP, S1

MCP, P7

"All children's rights are human rights. They aren't different."

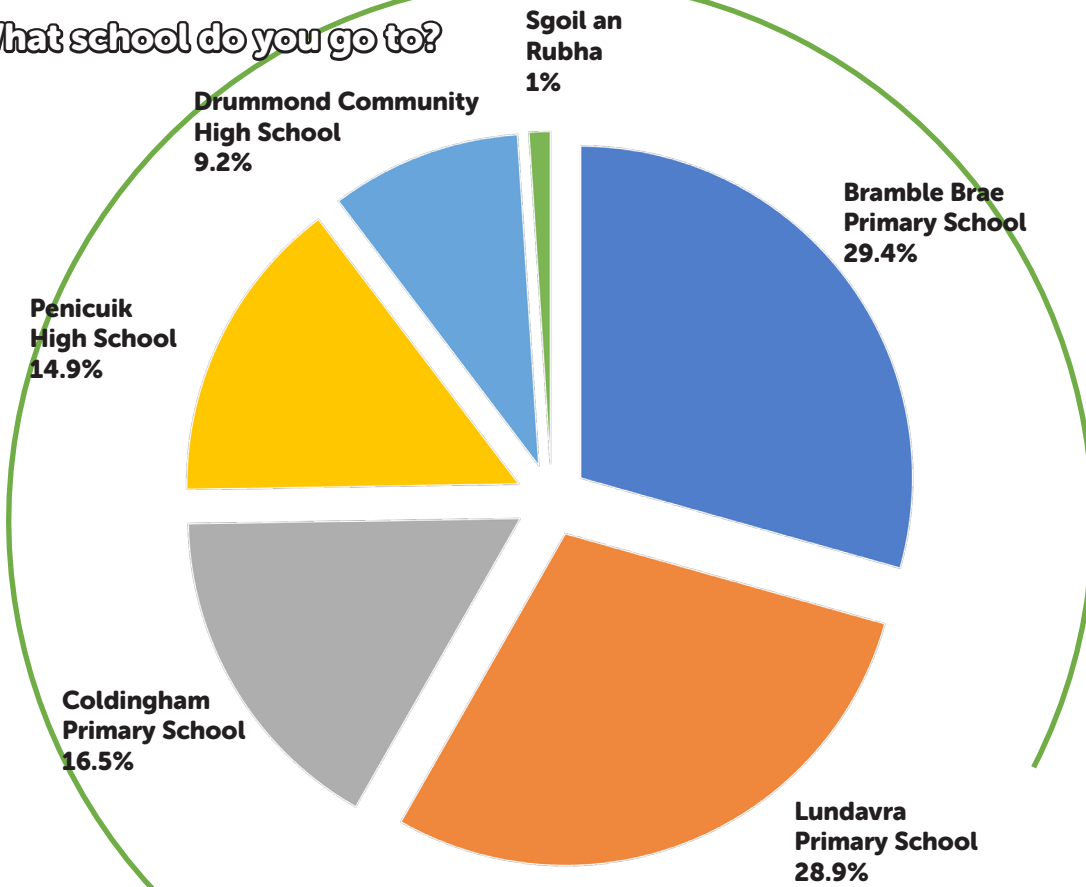
***“Rights are
what people
are meant to
have. It’s when
you make
children’s lives
fair.”***

- MCP, Primary 5

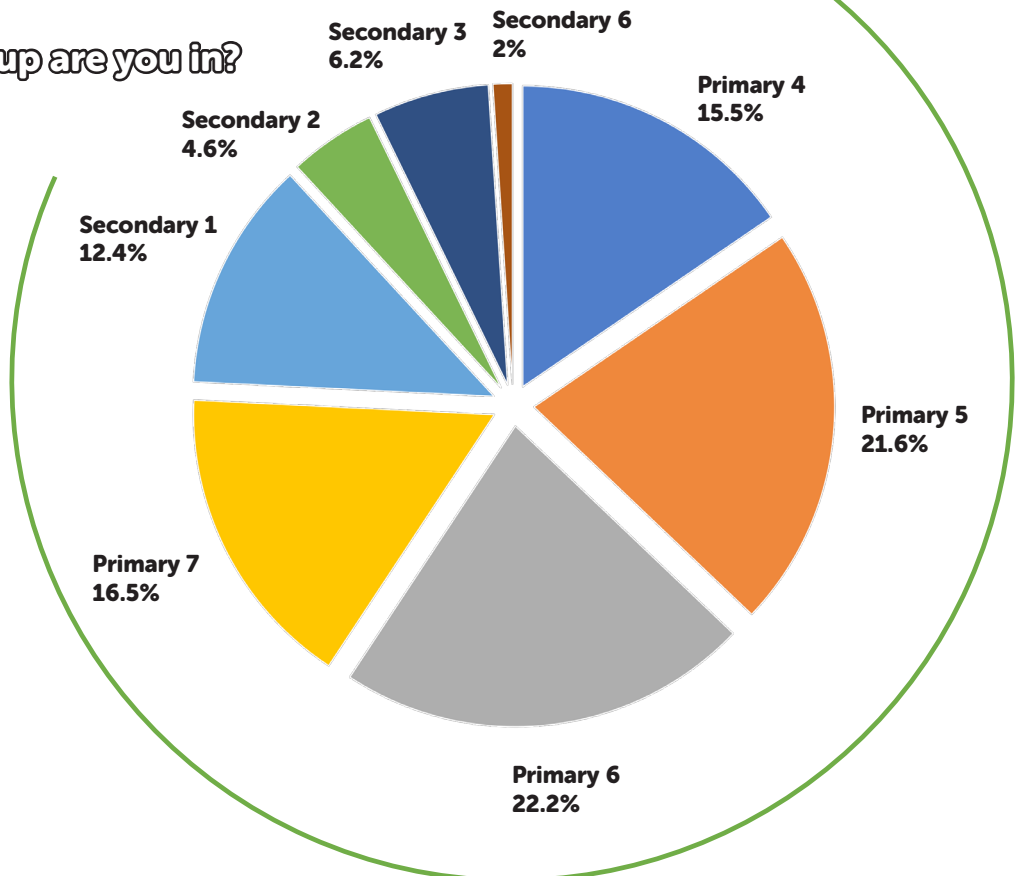
Snap shot: School food in Scotland

A total of 201 children responded to our school food survey, here are their responses.

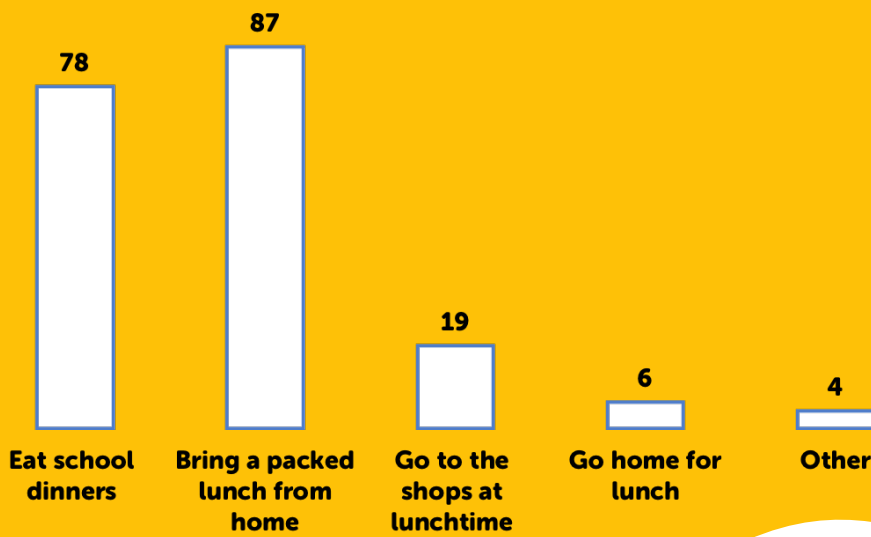
What school do you go to?



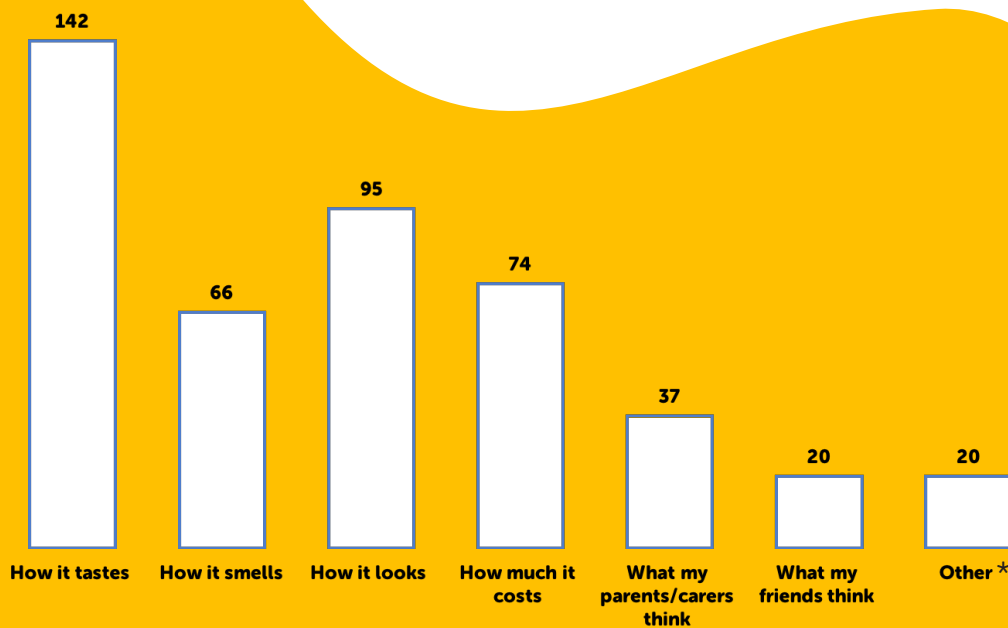
What year group are you in?



Most days do you?



Which of the following things do you think about when you are choosing what to eat at school?



* (Where it comes from, how fast it takes to eat, how healthy it is, just want to try it, if I've had it before)

Do you like the food at school?
Why?

"Because sometimes the food we get served is disgusting and rock solid."

"It's unhealthy, but tasty."

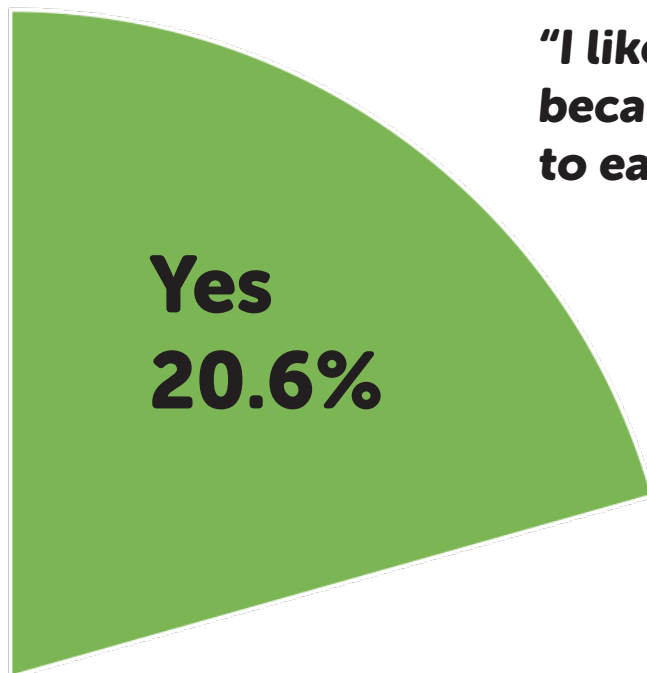
"Because cold meals are good, but hot are not good."

"The food is sometimes cold or wet."

"Sometimes the food doesn't taste amazing, but it's better than nothing."

**Kind of...
46.4%**

"Because it's nice and there is a variety, so you could have a different thing each day."



"I like school dinners, because it's something to eat during school."

"Because it's warm."

"Doesn't taste fresh, don't like the smell."

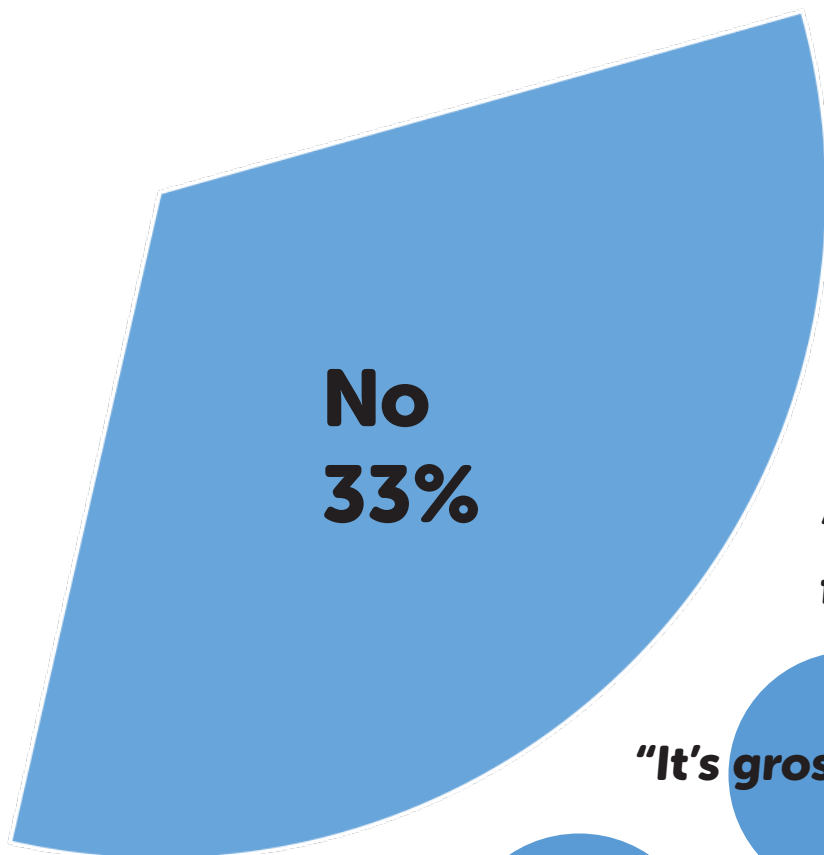
"It doesn't seem like it's good quality"

"It's not as good as the food I have at home"

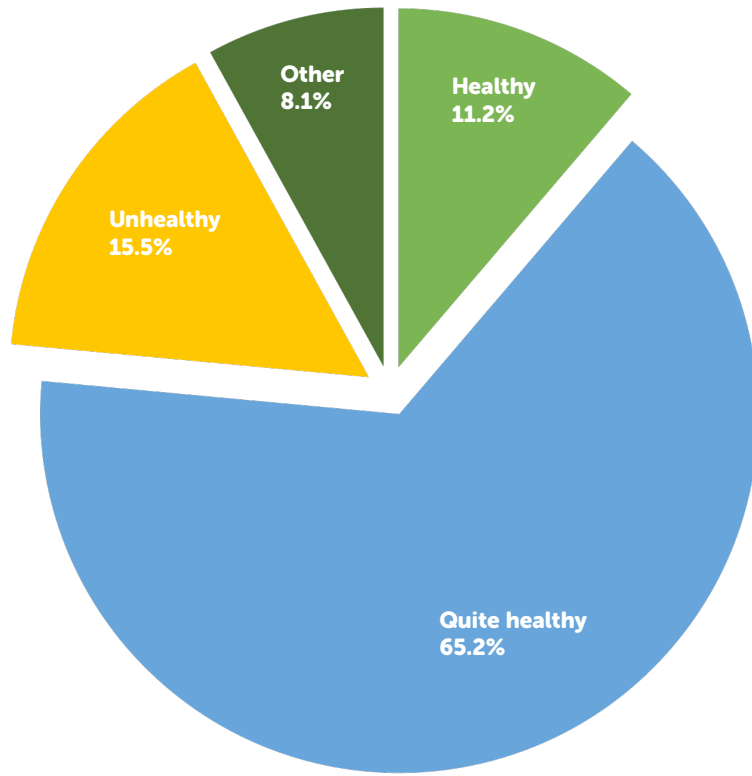
"It's gross and oily."

"It's bad for your health."

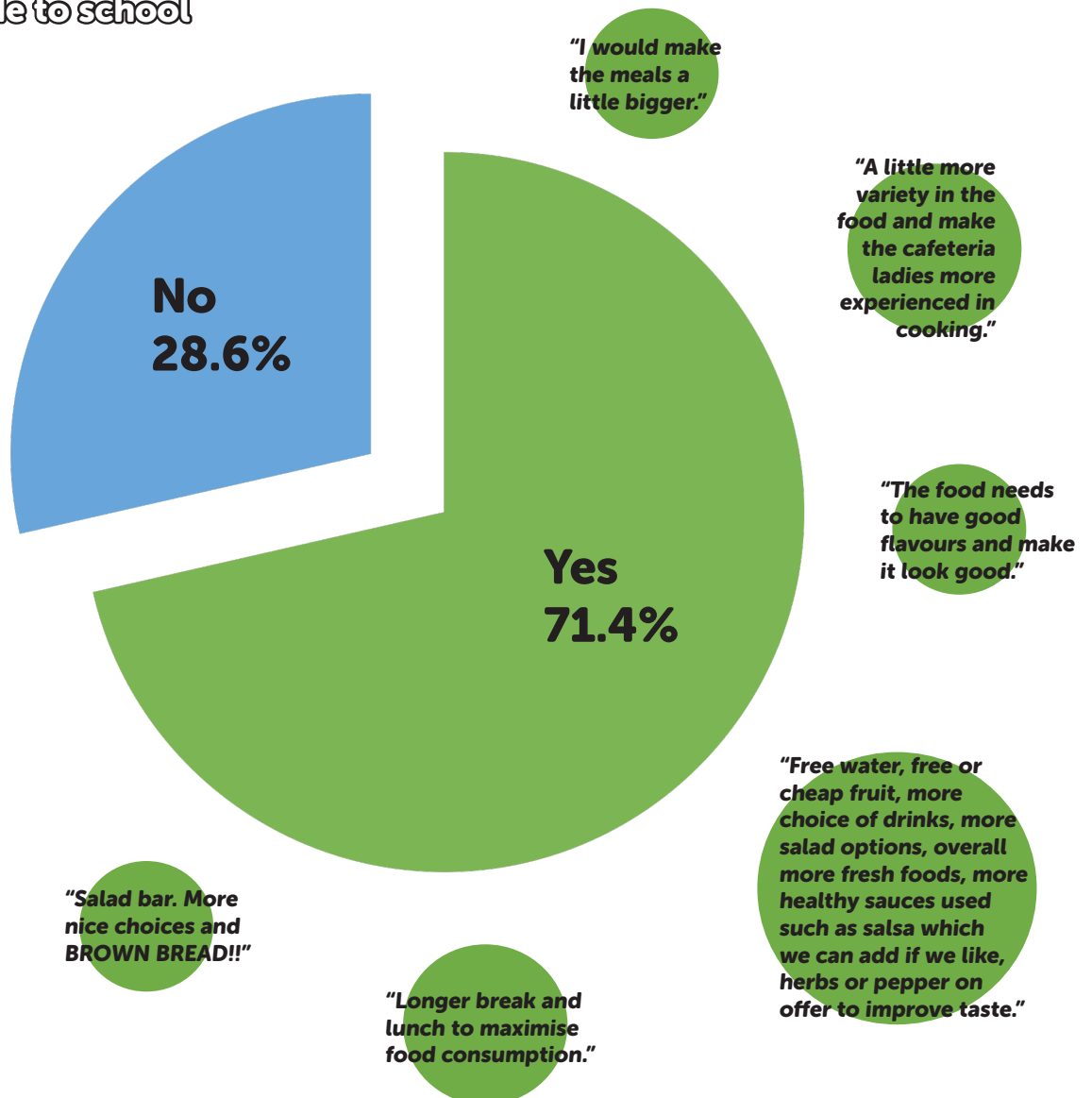
"Because outside there are more options."



How healthy do you think the food is?



Do you think any changes need to be made to school food?





Healthy

MY PLATE OF SUNSHINE

Happy



MY PLATE OF SUNSHINE

Happy



Healthy

Happy



MY PLATE OF SUNSHINE



MY PLATE OF SUNSHINE

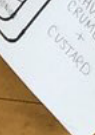
HEALTHY



MILK



BRUSSELS SPROUTS



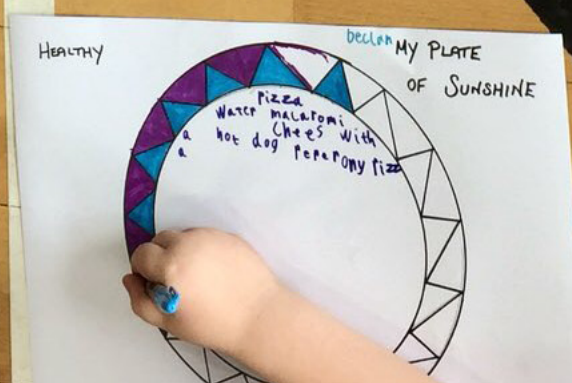
HOT DOG



CRUMBLE



CUSTARD



Healthy

MY PLATE OF SUNSHINE

Water, Pizza, Macaroni (cheese) with a hot dog, Popcorn, Fizz



My favourite food and drink is...

Spaghetti

A School Day

Children recognise that food and drink help them to get through the school day. Children highlight that feeling hungry or thirsty can have a negative impact upon children's learning and ability to concentrate in class. For some children, the food offered at school is their main source of nutrition and sustenance across the entire day.

To begin to understand children's experiences of school food and drink, it is important to understand the type of school food and drink on offer during a typical day at school. School food and drink vary considerably between schools, particularly with regards to when food and drink is available, what is available and how it is made available.

"Food helps me concentrate and means I don't have to think about getting hungry."

- MCP, P7

"Maybe the breakfast club could have eggs? At home, I normally like to have some eggs. There was one time when I made my eggs so runny it exploded everywhere like a volcano! It was delicious!"

- MCP, P2

"You get toast, cereal, porridge because it's healthy. You also get fruit. It's weird because you get fruit juice at breakfast but not at lunch."

- MCP, P4

Primary Schools

Some primary schools have breakfast clubs which take place prior to the school day starting. Children can typically choose from cereals, toast and fruit juice. Some schools provide additional options such as porridge or bagels.

Children speak positively about their experiences of breakfast clubs and emphasise the importance of having breakfast for their learning. For the schools where breakfast clubs are not available, children express interest in introducing a club to their school.

"I come to school hungry, but I'm okay because I go to breakfast club."

- MCP, P3

"If you don't have breakfast, it's harder to learn."

- MCP, P4

In primary school, children have a mid-morning break which lasts between 15-20 minutes. Children usually bring their own snack from home although some schools do provide children with fruit free of charge. Some schools have a tuck shop from which children can choose to buy from "healthy and unhealthy" options such as slices of toast, milk cartons, cereal bars, fruit snacks, muffins, cakes, cookies, ice lollies and frozen yogurts.

Children feel having a snack during their mid-morning break is important for keeping children energised before lunchtime. Some children "forget" or are unable to bring snack from home and therefore emphasise the need for having alternatives such as toast stations, fruit baskets or tuck shops to purchase food.

All primary schools provide the opportunity for children to purchase school food at lunchtime. Most often, this is a sit-down meal. There are usually a few options to choose from – however the number of options varies between schools. Children are typically offered a hot meal, accompanying sides, a dessert and drink. Some schools offer a soup and sandwich option and sometimes salad bars. The availability and type of desserts on offer vary considerably between schools.

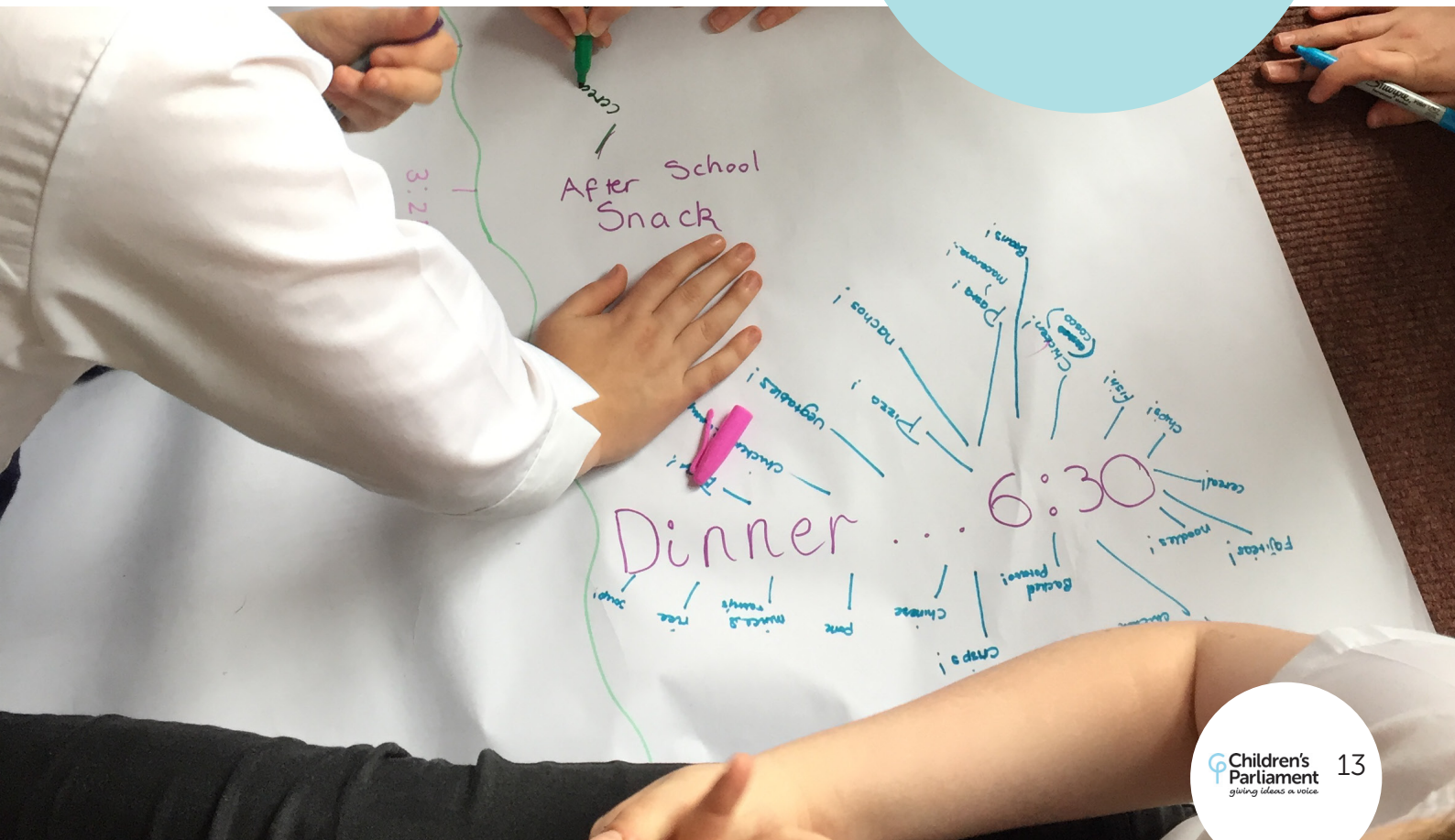
In all schools, children are given the option to bring their own packed lunch. Occasionally, children go home for lunch before returning to school in the afternoon, usually in smaller towns and rural areas.

"It's good to have food at break time, especially to give you energy to do PE or sport."

- MCP, P5

"Food and drinks give you energy to help you concentrate."

- MCP, P6



Secondary Schools

Some secondary schools have breakfast clubs and/or options available for children to buy food in the morning, such as hot filled rolls with sausages, bacon and/or eggs.

"I think they should have some breakfast foods available before school. It would be good because some people don't get breakfast at home or are running late. I'm always running late."

- MCP, S3

"I can't eat too early because it makes me sick, but then I'm really hungry by break and lunch."

- MCP, S3

During mid-morning break, children can purchase snacks from the canteen or from vending machines, including crisps, muffins, grapes. A typical vending machine stocks bottled water, flavoured water and "healthy fizzy fruit drinks". Children are less likely to leave the school during this time to purchase snacks because there is insufficient time to do so before the next period begins.

"We have three periods before lunch and we get really hungry. I think we should be allowed to have an extra snack."

- MCP, S1

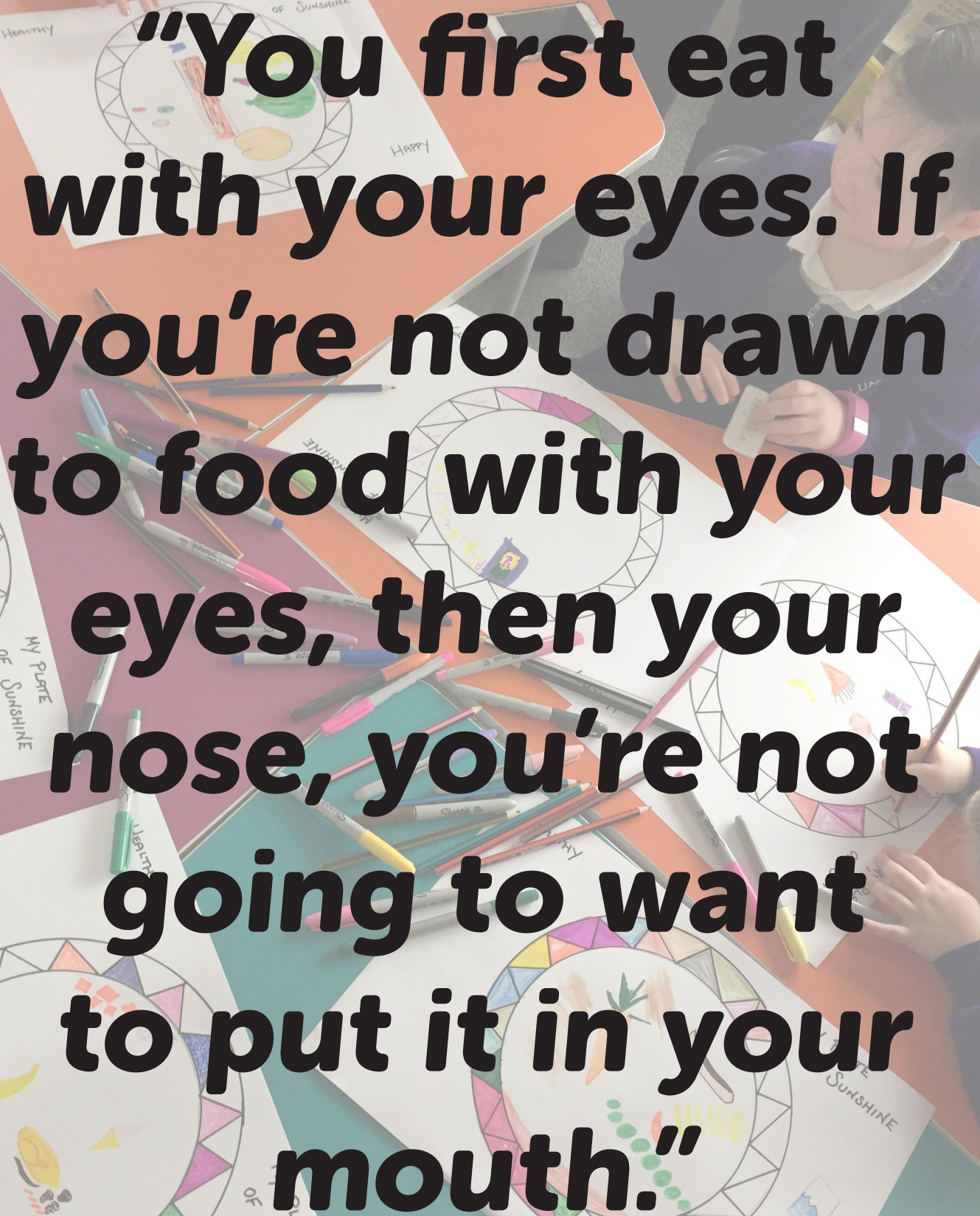
"Usually, I'm really hungry so snacks help me to get through the day and stay awake."

- MCP, S1

Children's experiences of school food and drinks at lunchtimes vary considerably between secondary schools. Some children eat in the school canteen where there are multiple "stations" for choosing a hot or cold food option. Some children bring their own food from home or leave the school to buy food from nearby establishments such as cafes, supermarkets, corner shops and takeaways.

"It's good because you get a break at lunchtime and you can relax a bit."

- MCP, S2

A group of children in purple school uniforms are sitting around a table, drawing colorful plates of sunshine. Each drawing features a central plate with various food items and a decorative border. The drawings are titled "MY PLATE OF SUNSHINE" and "Happy". The children are using markers and pencils to create their artwork. The background is a soft, blurred view of the children and their work.

**"You first eat
with your eyes. If
you're not drawn
to food with your
eyes, then your
nose, you're not
going to want
to put it in your
mouth."**

- MCP, S2

Through conversations with the children and young people, the following key themes about school food and drink emerged:

Key Themes

Healthy versus unhealthy

When considering their experiences of school food and drink, children often frame their understanding around how “healthy” the options are. Although these terms are frequently used by children when discussing school food, it is important to highlight that “healthy” is interpreted and understood differently amongst children.

Children refer to the benefits of “healthy” food for growth, development and energy levels, recognising that eating “unhealthy” food can have health consequences.

“Healthy food makes your bones stronger.”

- MCP, P3

“Unhealthy food all the time means you might be more likely to get sick.”

- MCP, P5

Healthy means you are ready for the rest of the day once you’ve eaten something.”

- MCP, P2

“I really like fish because it’s good for your brain.”

- MCP, P2

“Healthy food is better for your body as unhealthy food rots your teeth and puts strain on your heart.”

- MCP, P7

Children often equate “healthy” with having a “balanced diet”, a concept that most children learn about in both primary and secondary school. To children, a balanced diet is one which contains protein, carbohydrates, fats, oils and vitamins.

“I think about the Eat Well guide. Carbohydrates, proteins, dairy, veg, oils and spreads. On the new lunch menu, there are symbols which show you which food is a carbohydrate or a protein.”

- MCP, P4

To children, a “balanced diet” can include “unhealthy” foods such as sugar, fats, fast food, fizzy drinks and fruit juice, but that these types of foods and drinks must be kept to a minimum. In schools, children are aware of increasing efforts to encourage children to make “healthier” choices.

“Last year they took away all the unhealthy things, like fruit juice, and now there’s more things like oatcakes and crackers.”

- MCP, P4

“We used to have juices, but now we just have milk and water.”

- MCP, P3

“They banned energy drinks but not fizzy drinks. I think they should.”

- MCP, S3

Although many children welcome these changes to school food and drink, some feel making food “healthier” by reducing salt and sugar content has impacted upon the taste and enjoyment of the food. This can influence whether children choose to buy food at school.

Children recognise that “healthy” food can be made to be tasty, flavoursome and appetising. A reduction in salt and sugar can be compensated by using “healthy” alternatives in recipes.

“There’s less salt and sugar in school food than what you’d buy outside, but it doesn’t taste as good if it doesn’t have salt and sugar.”

- MCP, S2

“I think there could be sweeter foods at school, like sweet, healthy peppers and carrots. Being sweet doesn’t mean it’s unhealthy.”

- MCP, P1

“You can use dates and a teaspoon of cocoa powder to make chocolatey, sweet flavours. Cinnamon and ginger are also good for sweetening things!”

- MCP, S1

Children highlight their concerns about swapping sugar for chemical sweeteners and the lack of transparency around this. Children are critical of processed food which contains hidden ingredients and express a desire to know what their food contains.

"We should have pieces of paper with the menu and that show the ingredients."

- MCP, S2

"You know how some companies make food and say it's healthy and it actually has lots of sugar in it. Should they not tell us?"

- MCP, P6

"I'd rather have real food, not processed food with a million ingredients in it which I don't understand."

- MCP, S2

"I have gastritis, so I can't eat the school food because it's got too much sugar and fat in it."

- MCP, P4

When discussing snacks and sweet options available at school, children consider the impact of sugar upon their health and wellbeing. Many children feel sugar is necessary for keeping up their energy levels up throughout the day at school. At the same time, children recognise that sugar can affect their ability concentrate, making them feel "hyper" followed by a drop in mood and energy levels.

"Sometimes when I eat sweet things, I get really hyper and then really low and I just want to eat more. It doesn't help. If I eat healthy food, I feel normal."

- MCP, P4

Children also discuss the negative impact sugar can have on dental health.

"Sugar makes holes in your teeth."

"Yeah, I have holes in mine."

"Me too."

- MCP, P1-2

Although some schools have introduced fruit, yoghurt and low-sugar puddings at lunchtimes, this is not the case for all. Many children are welcome to the idea of having different, "healthier" options for dessert.

"I think we could keep the same puddings but make them less sugary, such as not putting sugar on the top of the shortbread and having more frozen yoghurt instead of ice cream."

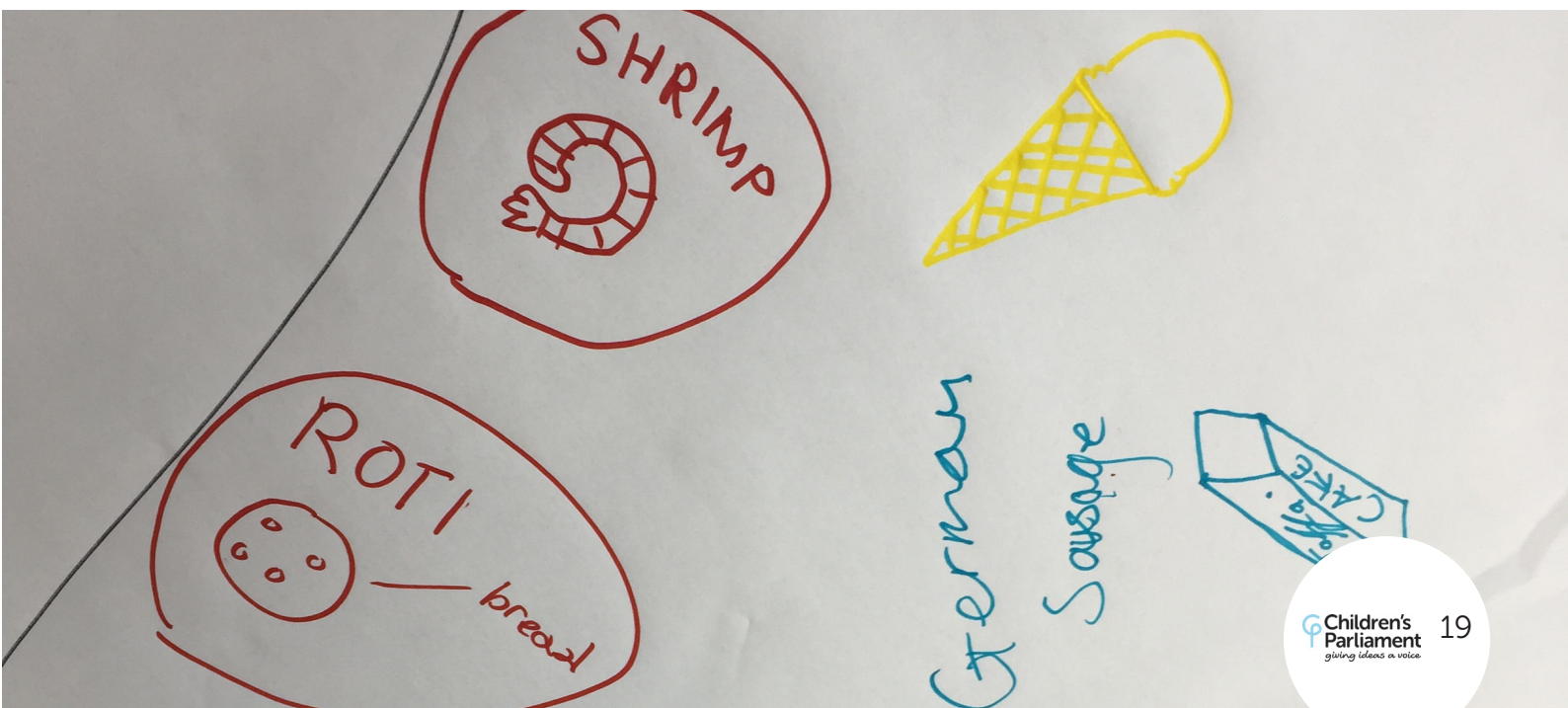
- MCP, P4

"It's not good to have puddings every day because they're too sweet. There should be two days of puddings in a week."

- MCP, P1

Recommendations from children and young people

- Introduce salad bars to both primary and secondary schools.
- Substitute white breads, pastas and rice for whole wheat or brown.
- Reduce the amount of processed food.
- Use fresh, quality ingredients.
- Find creative ways to sweeten recipes instead of replacing sugar with chemical sweeteners.
- Serve healthier desserts such as fresh fruit, frozen yoghurt and fruit puddings.
- Reduce the amount of excess oil when cooking.



Key Themes

Choice & Diversity

Many children across both primary and secondary schools highlight the lack of options available at school. For some children, lack of school food choices is the primary reason they choose to bring a packed lunch.

"I like sweet, salty and sour food. It makes my mouth go 'argh!'"

- MCP, P1

"You're forcing kids to eat something they don't want or don't like by only giving them two choices."

- MCP, P5

"If you have a packed lunch, you get to choose what you want to eat."

- MCP, P3

Children at primary school explain that although they are given a menu at the beginning of term, the food they receive is not always what it says on the menu by the time it is served on the date. Children from secondary schools also explain that although there is a menu given out for the term, it is not always necessarily followed.

When reflecting upon their current experiences of school food, one of the most common themes amongst children in both primary and secondary schools relates to the attitudes and control over what they eat. While not necessarily directly linked to children's perceptions of nutritious or healthy food, children feel their choices and knowledge of what constitutes as healthy choice are largely influenced by what they are offered and "expected" to eat.

"I like trying different food and I would like to try food from other countries."

- MCP, P6

"Coming to high school is great at first – it feels like you have so many more options, but then it feels like it's just burgers all the time."

- MCP, S3

"I don't know if it's healthy because the dinner lady just tells us what to have. We're just expected to eat it, but sometimes when the dinner lady isn't looking, I just scrape my food into the bin because I don't like it. I wish we had more choice."

- MCP, P5

"I choose my packed lunch sometimes, but sometimes my mum does it. I like the surprise when my mum chooses my packed lunch."

- MCP, P2

There is a consensus amongst children that younger children have less involvement in the decisions made about the food they eat at break time and lunch.

By the time a child reaches secondary school, children are largely responsible for choosing the food they eat at school, although they note that what the children can choose from is more limited than it might appear at first.

"You don't get pudding if you have a packed lunch unless your mum puts it in there for you,"

- MCP, P1

When considering what food choices are available, it is evident children feel there could be greater variety than what is currently available. Children recognise the importance of having a variety of choices for nutritional reasons but also for enjoyment, curiosity and cultural reasons.

Children are eager to try new foods and experiment with flavours. Although some children try new foods at home, in restaurants or when on holiday, they feel schools should encourage this to ensure all children have this opportunity. Some children have experienced 'internationally themed' days at school with others expressing an interest in introducing similar initiatives.

"They repeat the food every week."

- MCP, S2

"We had a French tasting day at school and we tried snails! We'd like more international food such as Mexican, Italian..."

- MCP, S2

"It's not suitable to have the same food every day."

- MCP, P4

Across all schools, children highlight that there is a significant lack of options for children who have dietary requirements for cultural reasons or for children with allergies or food intolerances.

"Yesterday was beef burgers, but they weren't halal, so I couldn't have it."

- MCP, S1

"Religion-wise, it's important to have choices."

- MCP, S2

"Food should be adapted to different cultures for diverse schools. We have people from different cultures and with different dietary requirements: gluten free, vegan, vegetarian, lactose free, halal, etc."

- MCP, S2

Children note that there appears to be confusion around what a halal-friendly diet entails and that children who eat halal are left with no choice other than to eat the vegetarian option.

"For people who need to eat Halal, there should be more options, not just vegetarian food. We are not vegetarians. We can eat meat – it just has to be halal."

- MCP, S1

"The halal food can run out and then I have to just have a cheese sandwich."

- MCP, P6

When considering vegetarian and vegan options available, children emphasise a lack of variety and often limited availability.

"Some of the options are good, but the vegetarian options are bleh. I don't want pizza or a baked potato every day."

- MCP, S1

"You can't choose the vegetarian option as it's only for a few children and not made for thousands. If you're not a vegetarian, you can only choose from two options, which you might not even like."

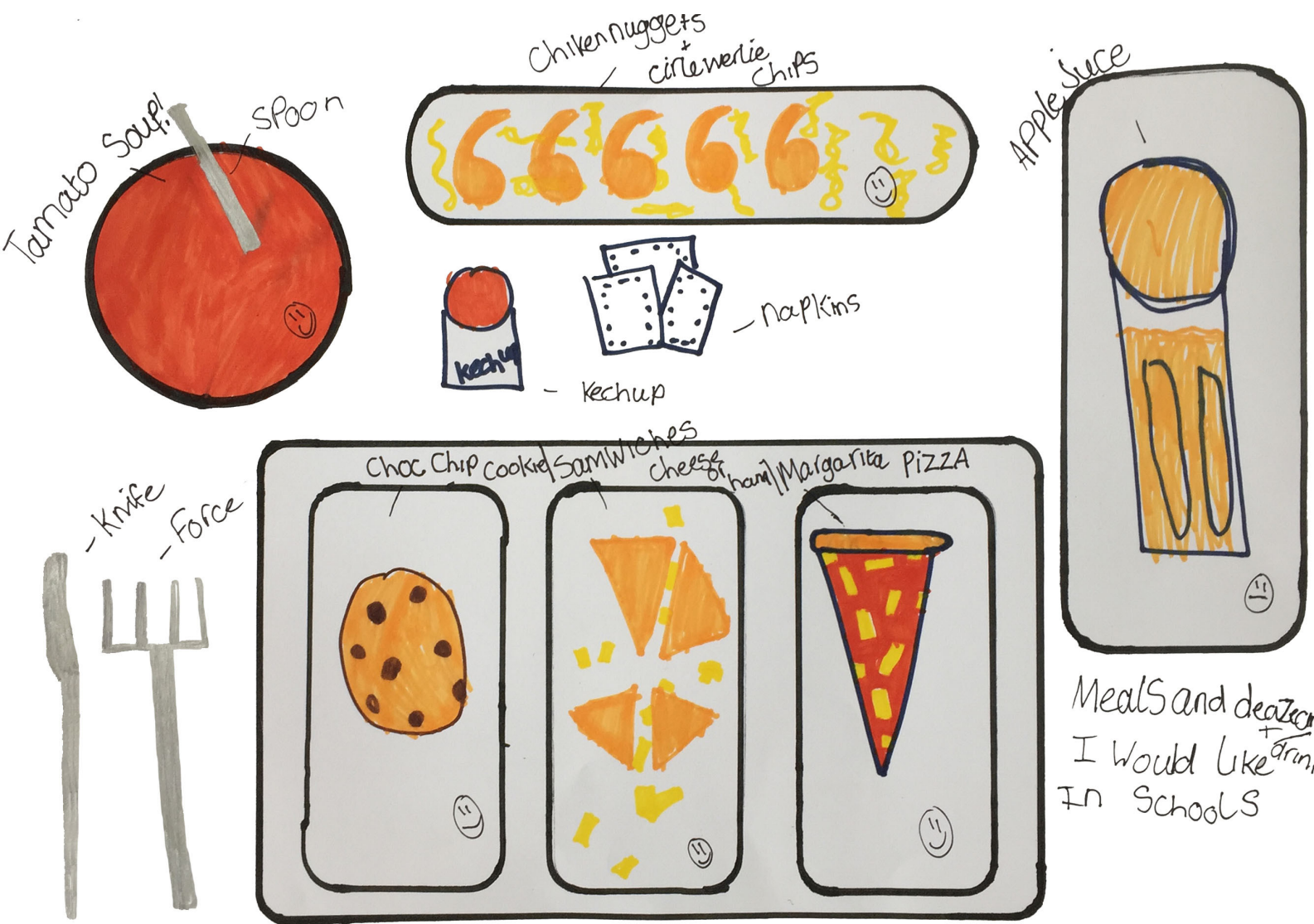
- MCP, P6

"Schools should introduce vegan meals for people with dietary requirements. That way, everyone can have something."

- MCP, S1

Recommendations from children and young people

- Introduce more variety into primary and secondary school menus by changing the menus regularly.
- Offer more choices for children to choose from.
- Ensure there are multiple options available for children which also cater for cultural or dietary requirements.
- Introduce international food-themed days to enable children to try new, different foods.
- Involve children in decisions about school food and listen to children's views!



Meals and deat^{er}
I Would Like^{drin}
In Schools

Key Themes

Which foods would you include on your ideal menu?

Egg sandwiches

Pizza

Tiffin

Salads



More fruit and veg

Nachos

Olives

Lasagne

Kiwi

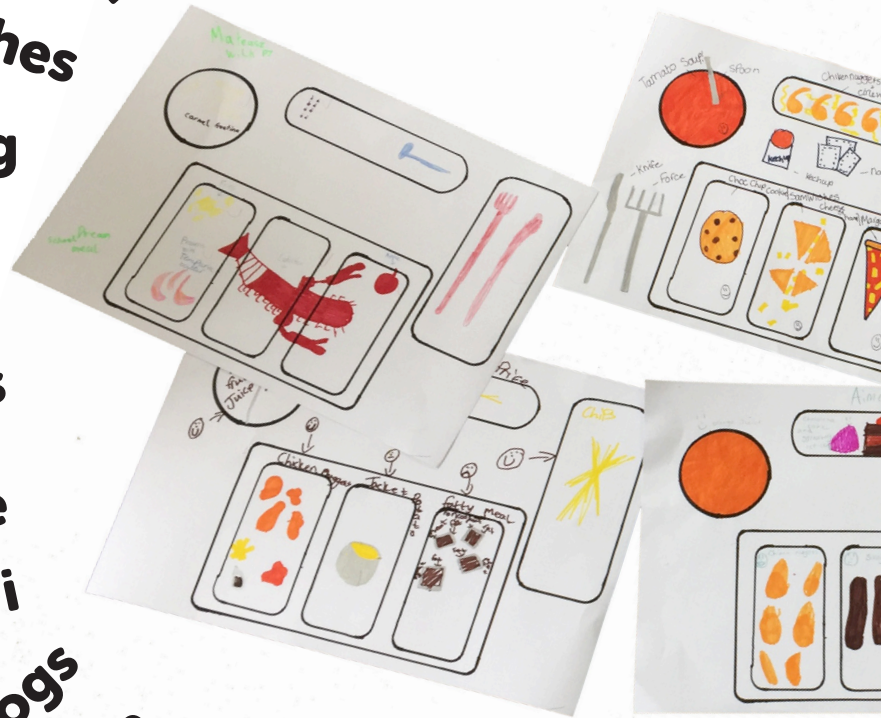
Hotdogs

Spaghetti carbonara

Macaroni cheese

Chicken or steak pie

Roast dinners



Soup and sandwich

Chinese or Indian food

Mexican-style chicken salad

Spaghetti with meatballs

Chicken nuggets

Breakfast rolls

Brownies

Mince & tatties

Chicken korma

Apple crumble

Chocolate cake

Burgers

Fish



Key Themes

Preparation and Presentation

How food is cooked, presented and packaged are important to children's uptake and enjoyment of school food. Whilst some children feel their school food is cooked and presented well, others feel strongly that the way their school food looks, smells and feels can make it appear unappetising - regardless of whether such food is perceived as healthy or not.

"The way the food looks tells me if I'll like it or not and the school food never looks that good."

- MCP, P7

"When we walk into the canteen, the food doesn't look attractive the way it's served. It should look nice – the layout should be different."

- MCP, S2

Children highlight that they are less attracted to food if it seems to be "rushed", poorly made or served without care. Examples given by children include rice and vegetables not being drained properly; food being over or under cooked; processed or pre-prepared and reheated foods.

For some schools, food is cooked and prepared offsite and gets delivered to school to be warmed up. There is a clear interest and enthusiasm amongst children of all ages and across the different regions in Scotland for school food to be freshly made and locally produced. Many children stress the importance of knowing where their food has come from and the ingredients used in recipes.

"They never drain the vegetables, so the water goes everywhere like one time it made my wrap all soggy."

- MCP, P5

"You don't know how long it's been in the container for – they ship it in and then just heat it up."

- MCP, S2

"I like mussels – you put them in boiling water. They're kind of pale and when they are open you can eat them. They come from nearby. And once I caught a fish, dried it, cut it and ate it at home."

- MCP, P3

"I'd rather know where the food comes from."

- MCP, S2

Some children talked about the enjoyment they get from being involved in the sourcing and preparation of food at school. Some schools have their own garden or greenhouses to grow produce in, for which children enjoy being responsible. Some primary and most secondary schools also offer opportunities for children to try baking or cooking during school.

"I'd like to do more cooking at school because it's so much fun. One time, we made pumpkin soup!"

- MCP, P2

"We have a school garden that we grow things in. We grow tomatoes and chives."

- MCP, P3

Children talk about these experiences positively and express an interest in having more involvement in the decisions being made about what food they eat at school and where their food originates from. For all the children involved, this consultation is the first opportunity they have had to share their ideas, opinions and experiences of the food and drink on offer at school.

"I liked taking part in this consultation because it gave us a chance to express our opinion."

- MCP, P7

"No one gets asked these questions. We'd like to have a say in the food we get. It'd be cool if we could make our own menus."

- MCP, S1

Recommendations from children and young people

- Ensure food is prepared and cooked to the best possible standard.
- Be bold! Improve the flavour of the food by introducing different types of flavours, such as herbs and spices.
- Ensure food is presented and packaged attractively and with care.
- Encourage schools to use locally sourced food.
- Where possible, encourage schools to prepare and cook food on site.
- Involve children in the sourcing and preparation of food as well as decision making about their school food.

Key Themes

Availability and Accessibility

Children highlight that the amount of food children are given at school is important for their ability to sustain energy throughout the school day. This is particularly evidenced by children reaching the end of primary school. Children in P6 and P7 (aged between 10 and 12) highlight that they often receive portions of food which are the same size as children who are in P1 and P2 (aged between 4 and 6).

In schools that adopt a class-by-class queueing system, children in the senior part of the school suggest that their small portion sizes are a result of food running out by the time they reach the front of the line. Children report feeling hungry and lacking in energy by the time they leave school because of having had little to eat at lunchtime.

"I think what you get for £1.90 is not enough."

- MCP, P7

"You only get between 5-7 chips, which is not enough."

- MCP, P6

"I'm growing. I need more than one slice of pizza. When I get home, I'm starving."

- MCP, P7

"The wee ones always go first so sometimes we don't get what we want because we're last."

- MCP, P7

"By the end of the day, I feel so sleepy!"

- MCP, P5

Some schools use a pre-order system where choices are made at home with parents so that children can choose their preferences in advance. Some children explain that their choice of meal is not always available despite this ordering system. When this happens, the expectation is that children must eat what they are offered as an alternative with little or no discussion or consultation.

Children in secondary school experience similar feelings of hunger and tiredness at the end of the school day, although they note that this is often due to how food is made available at break and lunchtimes.

"The school canteen is really tiny, so we don't all fit."

- MCP, S3

"Sometimes you don't feel full as you haven't got lots of money to spend."

- MCP, P5

However, the short timings of break and lunch at some schools can limit children's options to leave the school to buy lunch elsewhere.

For those who stay in school to eat lunch, children explain that there is rarely enough food available to cater for all children and teachers who choose to have a school lunch.

"The classes closest to the canteen get first pick."

- MCP, S1

"There are not many options and things always run out quickly. You basically run out of class to make sure you get food."

- MCP, S1

"Break used to be twenty minutes, but now it's fifteen. Five minutes makes a huge difference."

- MCP, S1

"I don't go out for lunch because it's too far away. It takes too long together there."

- MCP, S1

"We need a higher quantity of snacks at break. Everyone stays in and things run out."

- MCP, S2

Children highlight the importance of being able to access to water within the school throughout the school day. There are water fountains located in most schools or children can purchase bottled water from the vending machines or canteen. Many children are encouraged to bring in their own reusable bottle to fill up however, children explain that they are not always able to access water fountains if they are broken or if there are only a few available.

The alternative - buying bottled water - is not always an option for children who often have a limited budget for food and drink purchased at school.

"Make sure you have water in the school to keep you hydrated."

- MCP, P6

"Fix the water fountain so we can fill up our water bottles and we need more water fountains because we've only got one and it's way at the other side of the building so teachers won't let you go get water because you'll be gone for ages."

- MCP, S2

Recommendations from children and young people

- Increase portion sizes – particularly for older children in primary schools and in secondary schools.
- Create several food stations or "stalls" for children to choose their food from to reduce waiting times and to cater for children who have activities on at lunchtime.
- Ensure water fountains are available and accessible at every school.
- Encourage schools to listen to children's experiences of break and mealtimes at schools to create more effective queuing and serving solutions for each school.

Key Themes

Cost

One of the most widely discussed issues children raise with regards to school food and drink is cost. Children are aware that food comes with a price which can be a challenge for families living in poverty. Being able to afford food in the first place, regardless of whether it is healthy or nutritious, is highlighted as extremely important to ensuring children are happy, healthy and safe.

"Poor people who don't have much money might find it hard because they don't have enough food to get them through the day."

- MCP, S2

Although all children from P1 – P3 and some older children receive free school meals, children of all ages consider the cost of food to be poor value for money. Some children feel the cost is overpriced given the mediocre quality of food, whilst others feel it is particularly unfair for children who receive small portions of food or "what's left" towards the end of lunch.

"Our parents are paying for school food so if we don't get good food, then it's a waste of their money."

- MCP, P6

Whilst a packed lunch might seem like a cheaper alternative, many children explain that it is an expensive option for many families and not an option for children receiving free school meals.

For children who eat in the school canteen at secondary schools, even including those who are entitled to free school meals, the high cost of school food and drink can leave children still feeling hungry after lunch.

Children also emphasise that the price of school food often increases without notice.

"Portions seem to have shrunk and the prices seem to go up."

- MCP, S2

"For free school meals, I only get £2.55 on my card so I can't afford very much. Sometimes I can only get a juice or a drink and a snack."

- MCP, S1

"Because food is expensive, you only go for a slice of pizza and a drink. It doesn't fill you up."

- MCP, S1

"Not all school food is expensive, but the prices go up without you noticing."

- MCP, S1

"Eating lunch is probably more important than eating healthy all the time. It's important that all children eat something."

- MCP, S2

Children at secondary school explain that many children opt to leave school to buy food at local establishments such as cafes, supermarkets and takeaways because there they can get more food for the same price (or less) as food offered in the canteen. Many children feel the cost of school food items such as snacks available at breaktime in vending machines and in the canteen are overpriced, especially in comparison to bulk buying packages outside of school.

"It's 80p for a cake in the canteen, but I can go to TESCO and get 4 for a £1 there."

- MCP, S2

"You can get a £1 pizza at Iceland, but it costs 80p for a quarter of a pizza slice here. You can get a donut for 80p in the canteen when you can get 4 for £1 in a corner shop."

- MCP, S2

"It's cheaper to buy snacks outside of school."

- MCP, S1

"I wouldn't call it expensive, it's just pricy compared to what you can buy outside."

- MCP, S2

Children note that because food is expensive, they must weigh up what and how much they eat at lunch to get the most for their money. Often, they choose to buy unhealthier options which are cheaper so that they no longer feel hungry.

"People go to Gregg's, Tesco or Jackie's [local café] early in the week and by Thursday, people go to Lidl because it's cheap and they don't have much money left."

- MCP, S3

Recommendations from children and young people

- Encourage more primary and secondary schools to adopt low-cost, "healthy" tuck-shops at breaktimes.
- Introduce meal deals at lunchtime that are more cost effective for children.
- Introduce free fruit, veg and water to both primary and secondary schools.
- Reduce prices of snacks in secondary schools.
- Ensure the quality of food is reflected in its price.

About Children's Parliament

Children's Parliament is Scotland's Centre of Excellence for children's participation and engagement.

Children's Parliament works for a future where all children in Scotland are actively engaged in shaping our world so that everyone is healthy, happy and safe. We believe all children should live and grow with dignity and be valued for what they can offer the world.

We work creatively through projects, consultations and training programmes to improve communication between children and adults and to build relationships based on mutual respect and understanding. This enables us to explore our world together. We provide children with opportunities to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings so that they can influence life at home, in school and in the community through change at a local and national level. Our interest is in working with children, the adults who love and care for them, and the wider community in which they live in order to support our country to meet its obligations to our youngest citizens.

Children's Parliament uses a rights-based approach and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the foundation for all of our work.

In 2017, Children's Parliament turned 21 years old. To celebrate our birthday, we reviewed our work and published "What Kind of Scotland?". This reflective and celebratory report highlights the voices of Scotland's children:

<https://www.childrensparliament.org.uk/what-kind-of-scotland/>

