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Nutritious meals to be trialled in primary schools

Nutritionally balanced meals could be provided for primary school children, if a pilot project can demonstrate that the model is feasible in Jersey.

Officers within Children, Young People, Education and Skills have partnered with the charity Caring Cooks and colleagues across Health and Community Services and Strategic Policy, Performance and Population to design the new approach that will aim to support the dietary needs of primary school children. The new model will now be piloted in two primary schools, Samarès and Janvrin, using up to £200,000 of contingency funding.

The project, which will launch in the autumn term, has been designed as a universal programme to benefit all children and with the aim to give consistent nutritious food during the school day. It will cost £2.50 for a main meal, dessert and drink, and some children will be eligible for a free meal.

Martin Knight, Director of Public Health Policy, said: "Putting the onus on busy parents to provide packed lunches that meet nutritional guidelines is challenging and doesn't always lead to consistent positive outcomes for children. Many schools have done good work with parents to improve the standards of packed school lunches but we know that some lunches still contain high levels of sodium, sugar and saturated fats.

"Providing nutritious food for children to eat throughout the school day will have a significant impact on their physical and mental wellbeing, reducing their risks of becoming obese, or developing illnesses like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. The school meal project, if successful, will allow us to intervene early in children's lives to help them to develop positive dietary habits that they can continue into adulthood."

The Education Minister, Senator Tracey Vallois, said: "We are committed to putting children first, as well as improving islanders' health and wellbeing. It is important that children have daily access to healthy nutritious food while at school; there is growing evidence that a good diet and nutrition improves student performance. Learning how to eat healthily will also support children's overall health as they grow up, and help give them the best possible educational start."

The pilot will be trialled for two years in order to assess the impact of the meals before looking at whether it can be rolled out at all primary schools. If the project is successful then any extension of the programme would go out to tender.

Caring Cooks is a Jersey-based charity set up to promote and encourage healthy eating among young people from an early age and, where necessary, to provide support to parents and carers so that children have access to nutritious food more often. The charity's Chief Executive Officer, Melissa Nobrega, commented: "We applaud the Government of Jersey for undertaking this initiative and we look forward to employing the team that will prepare and deliver the food each day to the schools taking part in the pilot. We hope the trial will show the value of providing nutritious, balanced school meals to children as part of their wellbeing and that, as a result, the scheme will be extended to all primary schoolchildren."

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