

Marden Primary School
Parents' Forum Meeting with GSS & KCC
20th April 2016 9am

Minutes

Present - Jane McIntyre GSS, Jenny Wood KCC, Sarah Beckett Deputy Head, Laura Reeves taking minutes.

JW introduced herself, explaining that her role at KCC is to check that GSS are providing the service required. She said that she is responsible for checking the menu, the quality of food, checking portion control and the competency of staff. Jenny Wood said she is Operations Manager at GSS.

This meeting was arranged in response to high interest in this topic raised at the previous Parents' Forum meeting. One parent was present for the meeting, with two other parents joining parts of the meeting.

Questions:

How often do visits/inspections take place and are they announced or random?

JW said that the majority of visits by the KCC are unannounced, at least one full visit per school year (for the whole day) and if required, follow up visits. There are also three cleaning checks, which take a couple of hours, and three out of hours checks. They have regular meetings with the Leadership team at Marden, deal with any queries the kitchen staff may have and do GSS staff appraisals. JM said that GSS complete 2 audits every term, one out of hours visit and one visit at lunch time. The area manager submits all findings to KCC.

SB added that the meetings have been fluid, depending on needs raised by staff, the School Council or parents. The school have been actively working with KCC and GSS.

It takes a long time for allergies to be dealt with, up to 8 weeks for GSS to contact the parents. It is very important for children with allergies to be dealt with quickly.

JM said that GSS have a strict policy when it comes to allergies; once a form is received it is unusual for it to take so long.

The take up of school meals seems low (only higher on chip day). A parent reported that there was a general feeling that parents were unhappy with the meals but had not wanted to attend the meeting as they felt there would be no changes made. For some children this might be the only hot meal they have and it is important for the children to be provided with a nutritious meal. Children talk to each other and, if overall their experience is good, that will be fed back to their peers. As a result, more will want to have school meals.

JW agreed that parents' perceptions of school dinners are important. A lot of hard work has gone into improving school meals, which are environmentally sourced, organic and checked to ensure that they meet all the Government's standards. Across the country the take up is higher on fish and chip and roast dinner days, probably because this is familiar food to the children.

It was mentioned that Jamaican pate and BBQ jerk dip was one example of food on the menu that children might not recognise and therefore, possibly not choose.

JM understood the point raised, but explained that it is also important to offer different foods to educate children.

The menu sent out by GSS is good for parents, but children need an explanation of the menu in more basic terms - younger children will not eat food they don't know.

JM said that the menu is designed by a menu development team, who work hard to introduce different flavours to children. The food from the menu is also tasted by teams from KCC.

It was suggested that the menu could be planned around such things as Around the World Day, for example, Chinese Day, where children could have a map and talk about where the food comes from.

It was acknowledged that this could be a good marketing opportunity.

It was mentioned that the portion sizes were too small, especially for older children and also when it was a food such as pizza. If Government guidelines state a maximum calorific value for each meal, then could the content be changed so that it is healthier and the amount could then increase?

The portions are small for KS2 because the kitchen has run out of food by the second sitting.

JW said they take on board the comments about portion size and will monitor. They have worked with the cook to resolve issues and endeavour to get things right. JW said the sizes now meet Government guidelines. She provided a pizza tray and the portion sizes were demonstrated. It was explained that pizza is also offered with a carbohydrate, salad or vegetables and bread.

JW asked if waste was an issue at Marden?

SB said that the amount of waste varied. If there is an issue with the food or it is unpopular, there tends to be more waste. It was checked whether spare food could be offered as second helpings because Midday Meal Supervisors had been told, in the past, that seconds could not be served.

JW said yes, rather than throw it away. The only reason why seconds might not be served may be if there is insufficient time in the half hour sittings. The meals are fully compliant with Government guidelines and GSS makes sure it always offers healthy choices. A standard meal also comes with an option of additional salads and bread.

Not all children like salads. Could there be an option of roasted vegetables, for instance?

JM explained that Government guidelines state a maximum of three fried products a week. She said to accommodate all children was extremely difficult but schools are visited regularly and an open forum is encouraged. JW said there is a good take up of meals at Marden – 60/70%.

It was suggested that there are too many jacket potatoes offered – children will choose these over other more unusual items on the menu.

JW said it has been recognised that this could be an issue but some parents still want GSS to keep jacket potatoes as a regular option. In some schools, the jacket potatoes are not openly shown so that the main option is actively encouraged. However, jackets are available if requested.

Regarding allergies and vegetarians, is there a record kept for the kitchen to be able to identify these children?

SB explained that there is. Kitchen staff have photos identifying children with dietary needs. In addition, the school also use coloured bands to identify if children require the vegetarian option.

Could the three-week menu contain a form for parents to fill in, pre-choosing their child's meal?

JW explained that, in some schools, the children choose their meal with their teacher on the day and use different coloured bands to indicate their specific choice, but she was not sure how it would work logistically for parents to choose in writing three weeks in advance? JM said that it could potentially be done, but significant notice would be needed. The practicality of who would carry out the administration behind this process would need to be investigated.

A term in advance?

SB commented that it could be likely that some parents would not respond but would still want their children to have school dinner. It was agreed that the school could not refuse a child a meal if a parent had not filled in the form. SB explained that chasing up parents who had not returned forms would require a high level of time for our, already overstretched, admin team.

JM said GSS could explore avenues such as taster days. It is important to incorporate tasty food for vegetarians and children with allergies also. Dips such as Hummus are very popular. Photos of the food are displayed on the photo board and recipes are on the back of the menu for parents to follow.

It was mentioned that the GSS Website is poor and not user friendly because, every time parents log on, they have to re-enter all of their details. A log-on which allows details to be saved, would be preferable.

JM made a note of this comment.

There is not enough drinking water available at lunch times.

All children are supplied with a beaker and jugs of water are available on tables. In addition, a water dispenser is available. SB said she would inform the MMS of this comment and look into providing more jugs of water for each table.

It was asked if trays could be used to minimise spillages.

It was explained where the tables are in relation to the hatch. Children only ever have to carry one plate at a time to the tables, which are in close proximity, and trays might give them an additional element to carry. MMS are there to support and help the children.

Seating arrangements were discussed.

SB said that the seating in the dining hall is arranged by class, but that school dinners and packed lunches are separated to make it easier to serve school dinners. This point has been raised by the School Council in the past, but they discussed and agreed that this arrangement makes sense for practical reasons.

It was asked if milk could be provided at lunchtime.

Schools have to provide milk for those children whose parents want to pay for it, as well as a number of children who are entitled to it. To ensure that these children are able to receive their milk, it is provided at break-times.

It was asked if milk provided by the school could include a dairy free option.

The office will investigate this with the milk provider.