



A Better Deal for Free School Meals

A booklet of poems by secondary school
students as part of a project on food in schools



Contents

Foreword.....	3
1 Fingerprint	4
<i>Jannat, Halifax Academy</i>	
2 Fantasising Food	5
<i>Anon, Halifax Academy</i>	
3 Inner Strength	6
<i>Anya, Halifax Academy</i>	
4 Food for Thought	7
<i>Aliza, Halifax Academy</i>	
5 Young Researcher’s Poem	8
<i>Lara, Bedale High School, North Yorkshire</i>	
6 Free School Meals Allowance	9
Research Project	
<i>Violette, Bedale High School, North Yorkshire</i>	
7 School Food Poem	10
<i>Tegan, Bedale High School, North Yorkshire</i>	
8 Don’t Waste	11
<i>Musa, Dixons Allerton Academy, Bradford</i>	
9 Poem about Food.....	12
<i>Othman, Dixons Allerton Academy, Bradford</i>	
10 Reduce Food Waste	13
<i>Anna Maria, Musa and Rehan, Dixons Allerton Academy, Bradford</i>	
11 “It’s Us Eating the Food”	14
<i>Zara, Netherhall Learning Campus, Huddersfield</i>	

Foreword

This booklet contains poems written by secondary school students aged 13 to 16, from seven schools in Yorkshire, as part of a project on the reality of what life at school is like on Free School Meals – *A Better Deal for Free School Meals*.

The students undertook research in their own schools to investigate whether the Free School Meal allowance is enough to be able to buy tasty, healthy and sustainable food every day.

Their research was turned into a report, which the students launched at an event in Parliament in November 2023. A number of the students wrote poems to accompany the report, and they shared their findings and performed their poems with MPs, Peers, civil servants from the Department for Education, campaigners, academics and civil society organisations.

You can find more information about the report and the event, and see films of the poems being read by the students, on The Food Foundation website: <https://bit.ly/FSMallowance>

This project was led by The Food Foundation and the University of York, as part of the FixOurFood programme. Funding for the project was provided by The Nuffield Foundation and the UKRI Transforming UK Food Systems Strategic Priorities Fund.

Fingerprint

Jannat, Halifax Academy

Long queue, time ticking,
Tummy rumbling, heart pounding,
Will my fingerprint be enough?

Skip or spend,
Health or wealth,
Planet or me,
I'll just have to see,
Will my fingerprint be enough?

Pizza or potato,
Sandwich or salad,
Cookies or grapes,
Water or fizz,
Will my fingerprint be enough?

Costs rising allowances decreasing,
Eyes watering fists clenching,
Food for now or for later,
Who else will be able to cater?
Will my fingerprint be enough?

Looking around I see no prices,
No one cares about the sacrifices.
Do I buy or do I leave?
Will I ever be heard or seen?
Will my fingerprint be enough?

Note: Schools often use biometric cashless payment systems, which recognise students, including those with a Free School Meal allowance, by scanning their fingerprint when they 'pay' for their food at the canteen till.

Fantasing Food

Anon, Halifax Academy

You've been running through my mind all day,
The way you've been lined up like a buffet.

Waiting for me to spend my money
Only for the lunch lady to say; "there's not
enough, honey."

Walking away in humiliation,
Embarrassed of the situation,
Struggling to focus on my education,
And the waterfall formation.

I fantasise about food all day
Knowing I can only daydream about you in replay.

Inner Strength

Anya, Halifax Academy

Clock ticking, people picking;
Fuel needed, learning to be exceeded;
Queue growing, benches glowing;
Waiting for someone to choose it.

My turn, stomach beginning to churn;
I think I'm finally beginning to learn;

Fingerprint needed, someone interceded;
Giving up my turn;
My stomach filling with concern.

Will I ever be able to get rid of the feeling of nervousness;
Stomach telling me I'm murderous;
Not getting enough courage to say what I want to eat;
Whispers in my ear, hearing full of fear;
Thinking I'm in the clear;

Food needed, learning to be exceeded;
Need to get ready for what the day has ahead;
Body full of dread.

Building up the courage;
Can't help but shake the feeling of being judged;
Eyes around the room;
Feeling full of doom.

Whispers in my ear;
Telling me, do it, place your thumb on the scanner;
Choose your food in a polite manner.

Food for Thought

Aliza, Halifax Academy

They say breakfast is the healthiest meal of the day,
But please hear me out, I would just like to say.
Though I'm lucky to have a healthy meal everyday
Some of my friends are actually in dismay.
They wake up feeling gray,
With no breakfast dishes to put away.
At school I feel them drifting astray,
Their work is not good for display.

Struggling through the morning and now it's midday
The school canteen shows a full buffet.
But today my friends can only see what is on display,
As their thumbprint will have a limited outlay.
I can see them picking up an empty tray
As they glance at an impressive, colourful array.

In the classroom, their performance has slid away
Their concentration is definitely at bay.
Whilst they struggle to write their essay
With nothing more to say.
All we can do is pray
That they don't experience Groundhog Day.

Ministers, please stop this play,
My friends want to learn better every day.
With a healthy, filling, free school meal they'd be
professionals one day.
So here I say, please find a way to pay!

Young Researcher's Poem

Lara, Bedale High School, North Yorkshire

I love food. It was one of the reasons I was so excited to move to secondary school.

When I was younger, I used to overhear my sisters talk about what they had for lunch. From paninis to pizza, pasta and tuna melts, hash browns, cookies, cakes.

And the jealousy I felt when they said they bought as much as they pleased and how they loved that every Friday their school sold macaroni cheese!

Now I'm older and attend secondary school I can confirm that paninis really are quite cool.

A good school lunch is important because it will fill me up and give me energy. But mostly it means the younger me inside can feel as cool as my sisters did with their yummy sounding school meals.

Free School Meals Allowance Research Project

Violette, Bedale High School, North Yorkshire

I thought that I was the only one.
I thought that not having enough money
To pay for healthy food was embarrassing,
But taking part in this project has made
Me realise how many students go
Through it as well.

I hate that it's so much pressure when we try to
Choose quickly and not hold up the line.
For me my favourite part of the day is lunch,
Because then at least I can put my mind
At ease and forget about that horrific feeling
Controlling my stomach.
But it's not always what it's cracked up to be.

This project is important to me because
Not only am I doing this for myself but it's
Going to impact on other students' lives,
Not just because of the price but the fact that we
shouldn't
Have to worry about,
How much sugar we eat,
How much weight we gain,
And if we'll still have enough money for the next day.

This is my opinion and what I think the government can
work on.

School Food Poem

Tegan, Bedale High School, North Yorkshire

Whenever I am hungry or in the mood,
I run to the cafeteria and grab my favourite food.
All the teachers and the students alike,
Look forward to the bell to strike.
The clock is ticking down,
Everyone is watching it, no one is wearing a frown.
When the bell rings,
Everyone's heart sings.
Every day it can be something new,
From a full roast dinner to chicken stew.
Food helps me get through the last lesson of the day,
When I eat I feel like shouting, "hurray!"
You queue for what seems like an hour,
To see the tall food tower.
You have to decide quickly it's grab and go,
There is no time to be picky or slow.
When you have the first bite,
It makes you want to eat it all night.
You don't want to rush even if you look forward to play,
Because you have been waiting for this meal all day.
All the smells that have started to surround me are so
good,
It's my new favourite part of my childhood.

Don't Waste

Musa, Dixons Allerton Academy, Bradford

"Don't waste food", is a common say,
But how many of us are eager to obey?

Food has been wasted in leaps and bounds,
In parties of fellows financially sound.

Starving faces say many things,
Why are empty stomachs compelled to sing?

Why do children have empty bowls?
Being poor is not their fault.

Birth accident deprives them of food,
Hunger does nothing to help their mood.

They bear so many sleepless nights,
They set out for food with the first morning light.

But we don't care of their pain,
Our humanity for them has been slain.

So, whenever you leave some food in your plate,
Remember who stands hungry at your gate.

Poem about Food

Othman, Dixons Allerton Academy, Bradford

In a world of flavours, rich and diverse where taste buds dance
and cravings immerse, let me weave a poem, a culinary delight
celebrating the magic of food, day and night.

Oh, the aroma that fills the air, as onions sizzle and garlic
dares, to infuse the pan with a fragrant spell, creating a
symphony, where flavours dwell.

From the humble potato to exotic spices, each ingredient
adds its own touch of flavour, a dash of surprise, creating a
masterpiece for hungrier eyes.

The crispness of lettuce a refreshing crunch, tosses with
tomatoes, a vibrant bunch. Drizzle with dressing, a tangy
embrace, a salad so simple, yet full of grace.

The sizzle of steak on a scorching grill, juices flowing, a
carnivorous thrill. A tender bite, a burst of delight, as flavours
mingle, creating a savoury fight.

The symphony of pasta, twirling on a fork, coated in sauce,
a taste that cannot be ignored. From creamy alfredo to spicy
arrabbiata, each bite a journey, a culinary fiesta.

And lets us not forget the sweet finale, desserts that make our
taste buds rally, from velvety chocolate to fruity tarts, each bite a
moment that truly imparts.

Food, oh food, you bring us delight, from morning to evening,
from day to night. You nourish our bodies, you fuel our soul,
with flavours and textures that make us whole.

Reduce Food Waste

*Anna Maria, Musa and Rehan, Dixons Allerton
Academy, Bradford*

In kitchens hushed, where echoes of hunger fade,
A ballet of neglect, a wasteful masquerade.
Plump fruits abandoned, left to wither alone,
Their vibrant tales silenced, their purpose unknown.

Mountains of bread, once golden and warm,
Now discarded, forgotten, a casualty of the norm.
In bins, a mosaic of edible despair,
A symphony of waste that hangs in the air.

Yet, in this tragedy, a lesson to find,
A call to mindfulness, to hearts and to mind.
Let us savour each morsel, embrace what we taste,
For in reducing waste, a greener future is embraced.

So, let not the banquet become a lament,
As we cherish each bite, with gratitude lent.
For in the dance of consumption, let awareness lead,
A rhythm of change, where food waste may concede.

“It’s Us Eating the Food”

Zara, Netherhall Learning Campus, Huddersfield

Beneath the school’s embrace, where friendships ignite,
A feast for the senses, a culinary rite.

“It’s us eating the food,” our chorus takes flight,
In each savoury bite, our stories unite.

Plates adorned with promise, a canvas of hue,
Whispers of flavours, both vibrant and true.
With every shared meal, a memory’s made,
In the symphony of lunchtime, our bonds never fade.

With vigour and zeal, we face the day’s quest,
In the realm of learning, we give it our best.
For a good school lunch, it’s a cornerstone, see,
It fuels our ambitions, empowers us to be.

So let this refrain echo far and wide,
In the tapestry of knowledge, let nourishment guide.
For it’s us at the table, a testament clear,
In the food that we savour, our purpose draws near.

In the heart of the school, where young minds ignite,
A lunchtime symphony, a wondrous sight.
Plates painted with colours, a vibrant array,
Whispers of promise in every buffet.

Crunchy and crisp, a symphony of taste,
Each morsel a journey, no flavour to waste.
A chorus of laughter, companions at hand,
In the realm of the canteen, we all understand.

With bellies content, we march on with glee,
To classrooms and lessons, where knowledge runs free.
For a good school lunch is more than just food,
It's the rhythm of learning, the ultimate mood.

So heed our young voices, let our message be clear,
In the realm of education, let nourishment steer.
For a well-fed mind, a heart that's alight,
Ignites a future, burning ever so bright.

In the bustling halls where laughter rings,
A haven of sustenance, where nourishment springs.
A lunch that's not just a meal, but a friend,
A source of strength, on which I depend.

Colours and flavours, a feast for the eyes,
Awakening senses, a delightful surprise.
Each bite, a journey, a story untold,
A good school lunch, more precious than gold.

With energy rising, I conquer the day,
Challenges met in every which way.
No empty stomach, no weary soul,
A good school lunch makes me whole.

So listen, all leaders, with open ears,
The voice of the youth, dispelling our fears.
For in this simple act, a message so clear:
A good school lunch, we hold it dear.

About The Food Foundation

The Food Foundation is an independent charity working to address challenges in the food system in the interests of the UK public. Working at the interface between academia and policymakers (parliamentarians, civil servants, local authorities, business leaders), we use a wide range of approaches to make change happen including events, publications, media stories, social media campaigns and multi-stakeholder partnerships. We are independent of all political parties and business, and we are not limited by a single issue or special interest. Our Children's Right2Food Campaign is a nationwide initiative led by young people to ensure every child in the UK can access and afford good food. www.foodfoundation.org.uk



About FixOurFood

FixOurFood is a 5-year research programme led by the University of York and is part of the 'Transforming the UK Food System for Healthy People and a Healthy Environment Strategic Priorities Fund Programme' which is delivered by UKRI. FixOurFood has a vision to transform food systems across the UK towards being 'regenerative'. We are working in schools and nurseries to transform food menus, environments, education and procurement, and we are supporting the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme in Yorkshire to evaluate its benefits to young people and their families. FixOurFood is evidence-based and we are committed to all young people having a voice in the future of the UK food system. www.fixourfood.org



About The Nuffield Foundation

The Nuffield Foundation is an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance social well-being. It funds research that informs social policy, primarily in Education, Welfare, and Justice. The Nuffield Foundation is the founder and co-funder of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics, the Ada Lovelace Institute and the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory. The Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily the Foundation. www.nuffieldfoundation.org



The Food Foundation CIO

+44(0)20 3086 9953 | foodfoundation.org.uk | [@Food_Foundation](https://www.instagram.com/Food_Foundation)

©Food Foundation. All rights reserved. Reproduction in part or in whole is prohibited without prior agreement with the Food Foundation. Charity number: 1187611.
