

AUGUST 2015

# SCHOOL MEALS PUPIL VOICE

## Participatory workshops

2015 summer term workshop findings:

Trafalgar Infants school

Meadlands Primary School



**food  
matters**

sustainable, fair food systems

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Trafalgar Infants School  
Meadlands Primary School**

***August 2015***



***“It’s a chance to hear from the children who receive the service  
– finding out what they think”***

Mark Davies  
ISS Director - Education

**food  
matters**  
creating sustainable, equitable food systems

# SCHOOL MEALS PUPIL VOICE

## Participatory workshops

### 2015 summer term workshop findings: Trafalgar Infants School Meadlands Primary School

#### Background

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Food Matters is using participatory workshops to gain a service users' perspective on meals provided in infant schools under the Government's Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) programme initiated nationally in the autumn term of 2014.

The Pupil Voice programme aims to develop a model approach for the appraisal of school meals providing useful information for school meals providers to assess service provision and possible service improvement. School meals providers are interested in exploring ways to incorporate the pupil voice into the process of improving the service they provide. The impetus for this is the importance of getting the service right for infant school children receiving free school meals under the UIFSM programme and thereby establishing wider acceptance and uptake of school meals into children's later school careers – in particular the transition between Infant and Junior School.

It is also important for schools to develop approaches for engaging with and incorporating the perspective of pupils into decisions around food in schools generally. This is an important criterion for the Soil Association's Food for Life Partnership School Awards scheme as well as for the Catering Mark standards for school meals providers.

Pupil Voice is being implemented in one infant and one primary school, each receiving school meals through the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (LBRuT) contract for school meals provision.

**Food Matters** (FM) has used its experience of work in schools using an approach based on Participatory Appraisal. This approach is ideally suited to work with children and specifically focuses on active participation and ways of facilitating the expression of different opinions without the need for written documentation by participants. The workshops are led by the FM facilitator.

**School Food Matters (SFM)** identifies appropriate schools to approach for this work and ensures their engagement in the programme and participation in the workshops. SFM co-facilitate the workshops.

**ISS Facilities Services – Education (ISS)** is school meal provider to over 30 primary schools under the LBRuT council contract. ISS are keen to explore and develop approaches for consulting those who receive school meals with the aim of ensuring that the service is as good as it can be and that children are encouraged to continue receiving school meals beyond Key Stage 1 (reception, year 1 and year 2 or Infant School).

## General information

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### Trafalgar Infants School

**Location:**

Elmsleigh Road, Twickenham

**Contact:**

- Lynne Thompson, Head Teacher
- Laura Sands, School Business Manager

**Timing:**

1.30 pm to 3.00 pm – 1 ½ hours

**Participants:**

- 12 members of the school council
- 6 from year 1, 6 from year 2.
- Equal number of boys and girls

### Meadlands Primary School

**Location:**

**Contact:**

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**Timing:**

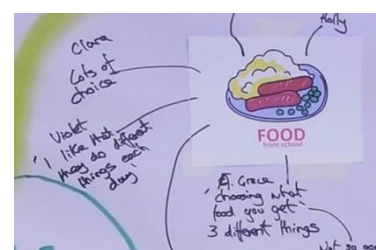
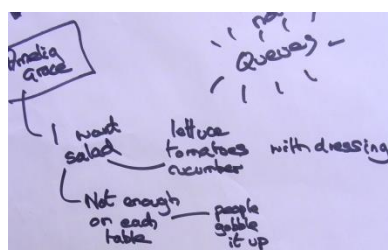
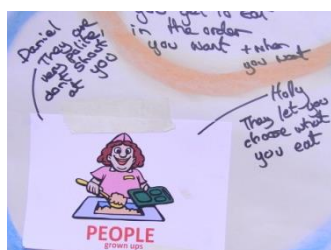
**Participants:**

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## Workshops overview

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## Findings

The findings are presented as key themes emerging from the four workshops taken together rather than from each separate session. Where findings are particular to just one school or a specific session this is made clear and explained. Each of the key themes is summarised, explained and illustrated using selected verbatim comments from the children. Some of the comments represent personal preferences regarding particular meals, portion sizes etc. however, where more than one child makes a similar comment or talks about the same topic this is represented as a theme arising from the workshop.

Whilst acknowledging that the group of participating children is relatively small it is also recognised that the school council is a broadly representative group of boys and girls. Therefore it is assumed that for the purpose of this analysis the perspectives and opinions provided are representative of the children attending this part of the school (year 1 and year 2 pupils).



The lunch time evaluation line being annotated during the workshop at Trafalgar Infants School.

## Key themes

### A. Food

Food was obviously regarded as a very important feature of the children's lunchtime experience. When asked for the best thing about lunchtime 6 of the 12 children talked about positive aspects of the food. When asked for the worst thing no-one mentioned food.

The predominantly positive evaluation of the lunch time on the day of the workshop also reflects this. Only one child having a school meal evaluated it as between 'quite bad' and 'rubbish' based on the fact that he personally didn't enjoy the pizza he had eaten. However, 9 of the 12 children (75%) evaluated the food as better than 'quite good' of which 4 (25%) said it was 'brilliant' (one of these 4 children had a packed lunch).

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#### Choice and variety of meals

Children enjoyed being able to choose between three different meals each day. The kitchen offers a meat or fish option, a vegetarian option and an alternative every day. They regarded this as greater choice over what they could eat than if they had a packed lunch from home where the decision on what they eat is made by their parents. This strongly confirms the benefit of providing a range of options each day and the impact this has on uptake of school meals.

Children also appreciated the variety of meals provided through the week. The school has a revolving three week menu which helps to avoid any sense of regular repetition.

*Lots of choice*

*Choosing what food you get – 3 different things*

*I like that they do different things each day*

*It's your choice – not your parents'*

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#### Specific meals

On the day of the workshop the meal choice was between chicken curry with rice, Margherita pizza and a vegetable and chick-pea korma with rice. The chicken curry in particular was very popular.

There was little discussion of which particular meals were preferred; however, children identified the roast lunch on Wednesdays, fish fingers or battered fish on Fridays and pizza as highlights that they particularly enjoyed.

Comments about particular meals represent personal preferences rather than key themes. Whilst not being particularly representative these comments could still be valuable.

*I liked the pizza with tomato and cheese. Favourite – sweet corn!*

*Didn't like tomatoes on the pizza – cheese was good*

*Pizza – lots of tomato*

One child suggested that when a curry is provided there should be a mild and a spicy version available on the same day referring to the red and white version that are offered on different days.

Another girl commented on the small amount of salad available on each table.

**Magic wand:** *I want salad – lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber – with dressing.  
Not enough on each table – people gobble it up.*

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### **Portion size**

Two girls identified the portion size as an important factor for them and the fact that they couldn't have a second helping. Whilst this is a matter of personal preference it is clearly difficult for caterers to keep everybody happy whilst avoiding unnecessary waste.

*Bit more food on the plate – sometimes I'm still a bit hungry*

*School meals are only small portions – needs to be like dinner – bigger*

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### **Packed lunches v school meals**

Out of the 12 participants:

- 10 had a school meal every day
- 2 had a packed lunch every day
- 0 had school lunches on some days or occasionally

One of those having a packed lunch had been having a school lunch every day up until the Easter holidays after which she stopped. Her reason was that the school meals were too small and didn't fill her up and second helpings weren't allowed. With a packed lunch she felt that she had more control over how much food she ate.

The key fact in deciding whether to have school meals was the fact that they are free.

Children also said that the school discouraged them and their parents from what they called 'chopping and changing' i.e. having school meals on some days only depending on the meals that were on the menu.

Looking forward to the Junior School children said that the need to pay would mean that they would 'chop and change' and decide which days to take a school meal. It would also mean that some parents would stop paying for meals at all.

Out of the 12 children:

- 5 would continue having school meals every day
- 2 would 'chop and change' depending on the menu
- 5 would have a packed lunch every day

## B. Lunch-time procedures and organisation

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### Boy-girl-boy-girl

Lunch-time was seen by many as an important time for socialising as much as a time to eat. Being able to do this with friends of your choice was seen as very important. A theme that emerged throughout the workshop was the lack of freedom the children felt they were given in deciding where to sit. In particular they all agreed that having to sit in an alternating boy-girl-boy-girl arrangement was something they didn't enjoy. When asked to think about why this arrangement was encouraged by the staff children recognised that some children would mess about if sitting together but felt that this needn't mean that all children needed to be mixed up or told where to sit.

When discussing junior school meals one child assumed, hoped or expected they would be able to sit with whoever they wanted to, including a mix of school lunch and packed lunch children, and they saw this as a positive reason for having school meals in the Junior School.

*Only mix people who mess about*

*Can't sit where you want to*

**Magic wand:** *Sit wherever you want*

**Magic wand:** *Don't like sitting boy-girl order – packed lunch don't need to*

The two children who had packed lunches had more freedom to sit with their friends and not in an alternating boy-girl order. This was seen as an incentive to have packed lunches.

*I got to sit next to my friend – whoever I want because I had packed lunch*

Note: packed lunches sit in a separate area but not in boy-girl order.
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### Room layout

The only comments on room layout and positioning of the tables were made by the children having packed lunches. They were seated in a part of the room with no window and closer to the table where teachers were having their lunch. They saw this as a disadvantage.

*Sit next to teacher – don't like having teachers near us*

*Packed lunches sit in a separate area with no window*

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### Hands up

When your meal is finished a lunchtime supervisor needs to check and say that you have eaten enough to have dessert or leave the dining room. Many of the children felt that staff either didn't see their hands or ignored them and they found this frustrating when they only had limited time to play during lunchtime.

*Helpers don't always come when you put your hand up*



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## Timing

There was some disagreement over the timing of lunch with two children saying it was too late and should be brought forward by 15 minutes or half an hour whilst others felt the timing was right or even a bit early. This is obviously a personal preference but one girl said that she felt very hungry and was sometimes shaking before lunch time.

*Waiting for lunch time – too late, (make it) a little bit earlier e.g. ½ hour or 15 minutes*

*Get hungry and shaking*

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## In and out

Issues around timing are exacerbated by the need to queue and wait before entering the dining room. Children found this frustrating – particularly if they were hungry and keen to eat and get back outside to play. Children also identified that leaving the dining hall was chaotic. The lack of any organisation leads to a rush of children leaving at the same time.

*Lining up – sometimes nearly fall asleep*

*Waiting in the queue it goes in slowly*

**Magic wand:** *In the queue go in a class at a time – not individually*

*Crush when we run outside for playtime*

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## Seating and comfort

Two children said that they liked the fixed, backless stools and the layout of the tables saying that they were comfortable and felt secure.

*Like the stools – connected so feel safe – and long rectangle tables*

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## Lunchtime supervisors

Two children made positive comments about the lunch time supervisors and kitchen staff, in particular saying that they were polite. However another child felt unfairly treated by a supervisor on the particular day the workshop was held. Discussion highlighted that the attitude of supervisors and kitchen staff towards the children was seen as important and was generally very good.

*They are very polite – don't shout at you*

*They let you choose what you eat*

*Dinner lady shouted and said I couldn't have pudding – I had eaten a lot of the meal*

## SUMMARY

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### 1. WHO ARE WE?

Brief explanation including:

- Who we are
- We're not teachers and this isn't a lesson – WE want to learn from YOU
- We want you to tell us about your **LUNCH**
- No right and wrong answers – just what you think

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### 2. WHO ARE YOU?

Who's who and a quick opportunity for everyone to speak:

**Tell me your name** and

**Tell me what you think is the **BEST THING** about school lunchtime**

What makes you feel **HAPPY**?

What do you get most **excited** about?

What do you most **look forward to**?

- Record responses (draw if possible or write) on a '**SMILEY FACE**' flip-chart

**Tell me what you think is the **WORST THING** about school lunchtime**

What makes you feel **UNHAPPY**?

What do you get most **worried or sad** about?

What do you most **dread or get stressed about**?

- Record responses (draw if possible or write) on a '**GRUMPY FACE**' flip-chart

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### 3. HOW WAS LUNCH?

Understanding opinions of the meals and identifying influencing factors:

**How was lunch today? What do you think?**

- Stand on an imaginary line near to one of the faces and draw a face on a paper plate to show how you felt about lunch today.

**Why are you standing there?**

- Ask children who want to, to draw or write their reasons on the plate/paper or ask us to help
- Hand out laminated picture cards to show key factors influencing their evaluation
- Put pictures on the plates – more than one per plate is OK, all 8 if they want.
- Look for patterns in the distribution of the pictures – and take a photo

## What is it about the **FOOD, PLACE, PEOPLE, or TIMING**?

- Ask children to say what it is about the **FOOD, PLACE, PEOPLE, or TIMING** that they liked/disliked
- Record comments using the picture cards

**If you could change ONE THING about lunchtime today to make it better, what would it be?**

- Draw an arrow from the plate towards the smiley end of the line.
- Then ask children what needs to happen for the plate to move
- Take photos of the plates and picture cards as a record

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## 4. WHO HAS SCHOOL LUNCH?

Finding out who has school lunch, how often and why:

### Who has a school lunch every day?

**Are you happy** to have it every day? Why/Why not?

Have you always had it every day?

### Who sometimes has a school lunch?

**Are you happy** to have it sometimes? Why/Why not?

Do you decide on the day depending on the meal?

### Who never has a school lunch?

**Are you happy** to never have it? Why/Why not?

What would change this?

### Would you like to have school lunch in the Junior school? Why/Why not?

What would change this?

**What would need to change for you to start having school lunch, have it more often or have it in the Junior school?**

- Record on charts or sections of a chart with headings:  
ALWAYS  
SOMETIMES  
NEVER  
IN THE JUNIORS

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## 5. MAGIC WAND

Exploring new ideas and things that children would like to change:

**If you had a MAGIC WAND what would you make it do to improve school lunches?**

- Pass around a **magic wand** and record what the children suggest when they are holding it.
- Use a 'Magic Wand' chart to record comments.

## SUMMARY

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### 1. REMEMBER WHO WE ARE?

Brief explanation including:

- Who we are
  - WE want to learn **SOME MORE** from YOU
  - We thought about what you told us last time and we want you to tell us a bit more about some of it
  - No right and wrong answers – just what you think
- 

### 2. WHO ARE YOU & WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MEAL?

Who's who and warm up on meals that school could provide:

**Tell me your name** and

**If you could eat any meal right now WHAT WOULD IT BE and why?**

Do you have this meal at school already? WRITE IT ON A **GREEN POST-IT**

Don't already have at school? **ORANGE POST-IT**

**Which of the ORANGE meals would you MOST like to have at school?**

- Dot vote on everyone's **TOP 3 ORANGE** meals

**Which are your 3 favourite GREEN meals?**

- Dot vote on everyone's **TOP 3 GREEN** meals (vote for 3 different meals)

**Which meals that you could have at school if you wanted do you NEVER CHOOSE?**

- Write these meals on **BLUE** post-its and ask **why**
  - If there is time put these in order of which is worst using a dot vote
- 

### 3. INTERESTING 'THINGS' FROM LAST TIME

Actions to address from issues that were raised:

<b>EVERYONE STAND UP</b>
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- Think back to last time we were here
- We talked about some of the **things** that you thought were IMPORTANT about lunchtime at school – issues or '**things**' about lunchtime you LIKED or DIDNT LIKE
- In particular the way lunchtime was organised

- We're going to take one **thing** at a time and dig a bit deeper
- For each issue move to the area according to how you feel about this issue
- Is it: VERY IMPORTANT, QUITE IMPORTANT or NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT
- Quickly tell each other why you're there
- Tell **us** why you're there
  - What's the issue?
  - Why is it so important?
  - What would make it better?
  - What could you do? – What could someone else do?
- Record all comments on a flip-chart using the picture card of the issue and a **VERY-QUITE-NOT** grid (example issues from Trafalgar School)

- A. Sitting: where you want to (with friends)**
- B. Queuing: to get into the dining room**
- C. Hands up: needing to wait to be seen before leaving the room**
- D. Dinner ladies: how they talk to us**
- E. Serving counter: too small**
- F. Plates and cutlery: what you eat off and with**
- G. Portion size: the size of the meal**
- H. Seconds: being allowed to have more if you like the meal**
- Anything else that YOU think is important?**

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## 4. WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

Identifying criteria for evaluating meals

- Think about school meals and what YOU think is important
- All sorts of different things about the food but what is most important to YOU?

### Getting school meals right ... what's important to YOU?

- For each issue stick a dot on the chart to show, is it: VERY IMPORTANT, QUITE IMPORTANT or NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT

**Taste**  
**Smell**  
**Appearance**  
**Healthiness**  
**Portion size**  
**Temperature**  
**Anything else**

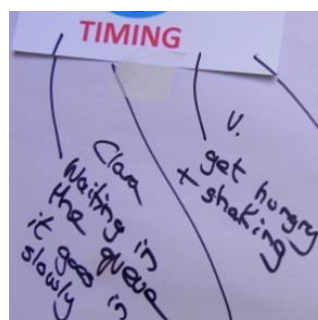
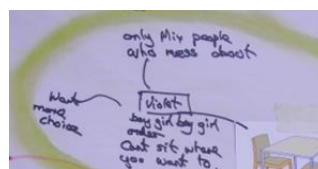
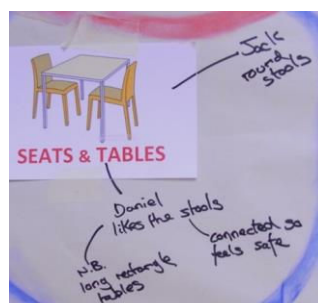
## Tools and activities

### Tool 1

Following an introduction to the session the children each identified the best and worst thing about school lunchtime using large 'smiley' and 'grumpy' face flip-charts. The question was purposefully kept very open to encourage personal perspectives to be voiced around the whole lunchtime experience – not just the food. It also encouraged discussion around lunchtime generally and not a particular day or meal.

The activity introduced summary picture cards representing different aspects of the lunchtime experience. These were used throughout the workshop allowing information to be provided by the children, recorded and presented back to the children in a visual and pictorial manner. This helped to stimulate discussion based on patterns and themes emerging from their conversations and allowed an initial clustering analysis of emerging factors. 8 distinct picture topics were used although discussion was not limited to these and the children were encouraged to include others if necessary.

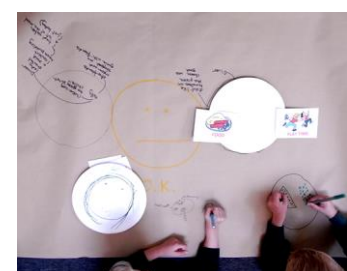
#### 'Best thing' and 'Worst thing' completed charts – Trafalgar Infants School





## Tool 2

The tool encouraged children to think about the lunchtime that had just finished. This aimed to surface specific factors that the children used to evaluate their lunchtime and provide a snap-shot of their experience. Whilst the evaluation is specific to the particular meals on offer that day it also helps to identify indicators of a good or bad experience which can be used in later evaluation activities. The activity was based around use of a continuum or evaluation line drawn on a long strip of parcel paper running between a positive end, labelled 'Brilliant', at one end of the room and a negative end, labelled 'Rubbish', at the other. Children took paper plates and placed them on the line according to their evaluation of lunchtime, drew a face describing how they felt and then chose picture cards representing the factors that influenced their evaluation. They discussed their evaluation with each other and their comments were then recorded by the facilitators on the paper strip.



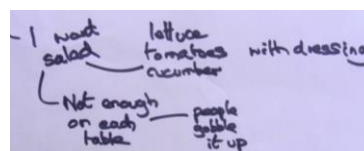
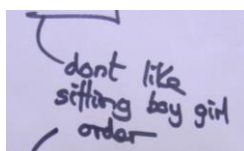
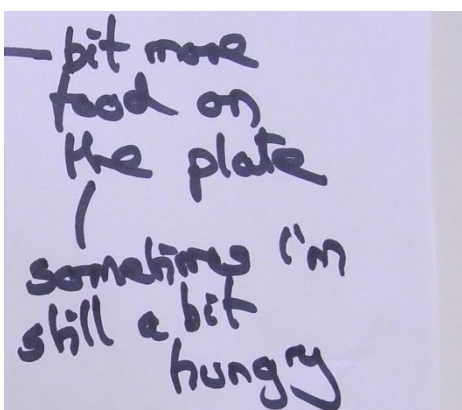
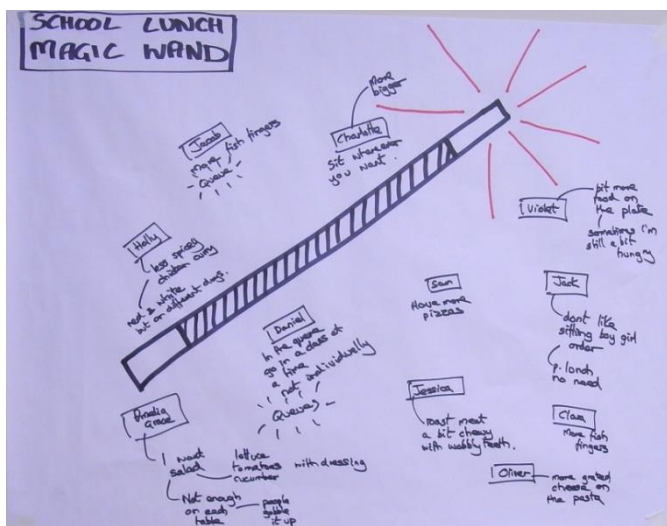
### Tool 3

Children split into different sub-groups depending on how often they had a meal provided by the school. A series of questions then surfaced different opinions on whether children were happy or not to have school meals or packed lunches when they did, why that was and what would need to change for them to feel different. Comments were recorded in separate areas of a paper tablecloth. The activity also asked children to think about and discuss whether they would be having meals provided by the school in the Junior School and what factors would influence their decision.



### Tool 4

The final activity used the symbolism of a 'magic wand' tool to identify what children would do to improve the experience of school lunchtime and make it more likely that they would have meals provided by the school in the future. Comments were recorded on a magic wand chart.



## Next steps

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The first workshop was designed to establish a connection with the participating children and give an idea of the style of the workshops and their purpose. This was achieved and many of the children, as they left, asked when we would be back. The workshop aimed to surface perspectives and identify key themes regarding the lunchtime at school including the dining environment, the organisation of the lunch time and the meals that were being served. Broad themes were identified which can now be explored in more detail in the second 'digging deeper' workshop.

### **Workshop 2 – Trafalgar Infant School**

The second workshop at Trafalgar School will take place on the afternoon of Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> June. Arrangements will ensure that a larger, brighter and better ventilated room is used as this has an impact on children's engagement and energy. The possibility of using the dining room for the workshop will be discussed as this may encourage more specific thinking about the way the room is organised. It is also clear that 2 facilitators will always be required for the workshops to ensure that the children's comments and conversations are documented as fully as possible.

The tools and activities used in the first workshop worked successfully helping to stimulate discussion and engage the children with the questions and themes of interest. The methodology will now be evaluated, modified and improved before being used at the second participating school and to inform design of the second 'digging deeper' workshop at Trafalgar.

Findings from the first workshop will be discussed with ISS to ensure that the process has surfaced information that is both relevant and useful. This feedback will be used to refine the first workshop for use in the second participating school as well as steering the follow-up workshop at Trafalgar Infant School.

The second workshop will aim to explore in more detail the themes that have emerged. In particular the workshop will aim to engage participants about factors which influence decisions over specific meals, make a comparison between a home version and school version of a meal and evaluate a meal eaten at school but not at home – i.e. something new.

### **School 2**

The second school to participate in the Pupil Voice workshops programme is not yet decided but will be a primary school where the change from UIFSM provision to paid lunches happens on the same site (i.e. the same kitchen, staff, organisation etc.). This will make it possible to more easily identify the key factors influencing changes in school meals uptake.

**Ben Messer**  
**Lead facilitator**  
**Food Matters**