**10. PROVING FOOD SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES**

**This guide provides step-by-step advice for schools in delivering effective food support to families.**

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| **INTRODUCTION** |
| Food support in schools varies in both size and structure. Many families in the UK today are unable to access or afford sufficient food to maintain a healthy diet. Faced with a range of barriers, these families struggle daily with food poverty and hunger, and circumstances can change quickly, leading families into crisis.  Schools have become the largest source of charitable food for struggling families, increasingly stepping in to provide support. Researchers have found that there are 4,000 school-based food banks in primary and secondary schools across England, equating to one in every five schools.  It is crucial to promote a positive food culture within schools and support pupils from lower-income households in eating better and learning better. By building social capital and engaging with local communities, schools can contribute to longer-term solutions, transforming the landscape of food and poverty in their local areas. This guide aims to help schools provide effective, compassionate food support, ensuring that all students have access to the nutrition they need to learn and thrive, while maintaining the dignity and privacy of their families. |

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| **PLAN** |
| **Identify Needs and Secure Resources:**   * **Assess Family Needs:** Work with the school’s pastoral team, safeguarding leads, and local community organizations to identify families in need. Use careful and confidential methods to gather this information, such as referrals from staff or discreet conversations. * **Establish Partnerships:** Collaborate with local food banks, supermarkets, and community groups or charities to source food donations. Partner with the school’s catering team to enhance your capacity for providing meals and food parcels. Sourcing food can also come via Food Vouchers or applications to the GF Emergency Support Fund. * **Develop a Distribution Strategy:** Plan how you will distribute food to ensure privacy and dignity for the families involved. Consider methods like discreet food parcels, a breakfast club, or setting up a food market. Ensure that these plans align with the school’s ethos of eliminating stigma around food poverty. * **Work with the Seasons:** Christmas and Easter are key times of food distribution so plan for increased focus around these times. Identify lists of families for hampers or food parcels via school connections.   **Coordinate with Stakeholders:**   * **Engage School Staff:** Involve the whole school in the planning process. This includes the senior leadership team (SLT), pastoral care, safeguarding staff, and teachers. Ensure they are aware of the support being offered and how they can contribute. Partnering with your schools catering team enables you to do much more than you would be able to achieve working on your own. * **Targeted Support for Vulnerable Groups:** Focus on families identified through safeguarding or housing concerns, ensuring they receive timely support. Coordinate with external agencies to provide additional services like housing assistance or financial advice when necessary. * **Clear Communication:** Use a variety of communication channels to inform families about the available support. This could include social media, newsletters, parent meetings, or direct contact from trusted school staff. Make sure the communication is sensitive to the needs and privacy of the families. |

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| **DO** |
| **Remember:** Respond promptly to caseloads and referrals by offering immediate food support and other essentials. Work closely with families to guide them toward stability, ensuring consistent follow-up and support.  **Distribute Food Support**:   * **Discreet Distribution**: Provide food parcels discreetly to avoid stigmatization. For example, arrange for pickups during less busy times or offer delivery options for those in emergency housing or with limited mobility. Discreet food parcels can be given to parents, funded by staff donations or via a local food market. * **Seasonal Hampers**: Collate a Hamper of food and other items to be delivered to families in need at Christmas and Easter. * **Run a Breakfast Club**: Operate a breakfast club that is open to all students, particularly targeting those from lower-income families. This helps create a normalised environment where all students can access nutritious food without feeling singled out. * **Provide Additional Essentials**: Alongside food, offer other necessary items such as school supplies, clothing, and hygiene products. This can be particularly important for families in emergency situations, such as those who have recently moved into temporary housing. * **Privacy and Dignity**: Maintain the confidentiality of the families receiving support. Train all involved staff to handle these interactions with care, ensuring that food support is given in a way that respects the dignity of those involved. Eliminate stigma through a whole school approach.   **Tackling Wider Issues raised through Food Provision**   * **Support Beyond Food**: Work closely with the school’s safeguarding team to respond to broader issues such as neglect versus poverty. Be sensitive in how you differentiate and address these needs, ensuring that families receive holistic support. Discreetly provide school supplies, snacks, clothes, and other basic necessities. * **Support with Housing Issues:** Assist families facing housing challenges by writing supportive letters and arranging meetings with local authorities. Advocate on behalf of families to secure better housing solutions. * **Provide Benefit and Financial Guidance:** Help families navigate benefits such as Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and other financial support systems. Offer guidance on accessing these resources without conducting financial audits, trusting families to communicate their needs. * **Collaborate on Safeguarding Concerns:** Work closely with the safeguarding team to address any concerns that arise. Ensure a coordinated approach to protect the well-being of students and their families. * **Distinguish Between Neglect and Poverty:** Approach each situation with sensitivity, carefully distinguishing between issues of neglect and poverty. Provide appropriate support based on the underlying cause, ensuring families receive the help they truly need. * **Assist Families in Emergency Situations:** When families are placed in emergency housing, provide immediate support such as food and clean uniforms. Ensure these basic needs are met the same day to alleviate the stress of their situation. * **Respect Family Communications:** Trust what parents communicate about their needs without requiring them to prove their financial status. Your role is to provide support, not to audit or challenge their financial situation. |

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| **REVIEW** |
| **Measuring Impact:**   * **Record Impact Thoroughly**: Document the impact of your efforts by using a combination of case studies, parent and staff feedback, statistics, and photos. Keep detailed records of the number of people reached, such as how many food parcels were distributed and to how many families. Maintain accurate registers to track these details. * **Create Case Studies and Stories**: Develop anonymized case studies to illustrate the real-world impact of your support. Share stories that highlight why food provision was necessary, what actions were taken to assist, and the difference it made in the lives of those you helped. These narratives can be powerful tools for demonstrating the value of your work.   **Evaluate and Reflect:**   * **Gather Feedback:** Regularly seek feedback from families and staff to understand the impact of the food support provided. This could be done through anonymous surveys, direct conversations, or informal feedback mechanisms. * **Analyse Impact:** Review the effectiveness of the food distribution, including the number of families served, the adequacy of food supplies, and the frequency of distribution. Look at how well the programme is meeting the needs of the most vulnerable families. * **Document Challenges:** Identify any challenges encountered, such as logistical issues or gaps in support. Document these to inform future planning and ensure continuous improvement.   **Plan for Future Needs:**   * **Adjust the Programme:** Use insights from your review to make necessary adjustments. This might involve changing the frequency of distributions, sourcing new partnerships, or expanding the range of support offered. * **Build on Successes:** Share positive outcomes with the school community and external partners. Highlight success stories to build support and encourage further involvement from staff and local organizations. * **Prepare for Changing Needs:** Anticipate future challenges, such as seasonal fluctuations in demand or changes in family circumstances. Ensure that your food support program can adapt to these changes, with contingency plans in place for emergencies. |