

Practical guides on school food programmes released

25 February 2014 – for immediate release



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Practical new guides for schools wishing to introduce food programmes have been released by Children's Commissioner Dr Russell Wills today.

The guidelines provide clear advice to schools, whether they are thinking about where to start or wanting to improve an existing food programme. They can be used by primary, intermediate and secondary schools of all deciles and in all communities.

"We know that children struggle to learn when they are hungry, any teacher will tell you that. So an obvious part of any food programme is about meeting that immediate need," Dr Wills says.

"But school food programmes can be much more than feeding hungry kids. There are flow-on effects that are just as valuable. A well-designed programme can bring the local community together, see more families and whānau engaged in their kids' development and teach children about better nutrition.

"When we started to look at this several years ago we discovered there was very little guidance for schools on how to get started or operate a food programme well. While there are many schools doing a great job of providing food to their students, often these programmes have formed organically and are successful after much trial and error.

"We wanted to remove the hesitation some schools might feel about embarking on a project to introduce food at their school and feel confident about what steps to take," he says.

The guidelines help schools from the early stages of identifying need, to finding sponsors and partners, to implementing the programme without stigmatising the children. There are also useful tips for schools that have a programme and want to improve nutrition.

The *Guidelines for School Food Programmes: Best Practice Guidance for Your School* are for all school principals, school management and Boards of Trustees. The topics in the five guides are:

1. Assessing your need and deciding the best response: understanding the needs of your children, engaging the school community, and the different models your programme can take
2. Getting started and resourcing the programme: practical ways to set up your programme and partner with the right people
3. A positive food programme that does not stigmatise: tips on how to make sure your programme does not stigmatise children and whānau
4. Healthy nutrition in schools: resources for providing nutritious food and promoting healthy eating
5. Connecting school food programmes to the New Zealand Curriculum: how school food programmes and the curriculum can be mutually reinforcing and make learning about food and nutrition real.

There are also inspiring case studies of schools with successful programmes and sample survey templates for assessing needs of students.

“I want to thank the Working Group that helped ensure the guidelines are grounded in the evidence, but also share best practice from others that have achieved great successes for their students, schools and communities,” Dr Wills says.

You can view and download the guidelines at <http://healthylifestyles.tki.org.nz/>