



UNIVERSITY OF
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for Health Research

The CANTEEN study: Free School Meals, Diet Quality and Food Insecurity in Secondary School Pupils: a Mixed Methods Study

Dear [Headteacher],

We are conducting a new study to find out more about how effective the current UK Free School Meal policy is. This study runs from September 2023 to January 2025.

Who we are: We are a team of researchers from Queen's University Belfast and the University of Birmingham interested in food provision in secondary schools. Our research is funded by the National Institute for Health Research. By taking part in our research, you can help further the development of national policy relating to Free School Meals and shape the health of future secondary school pupils.

What we aim to do: Not having enough money to buy food is known as food insecurity and is common in UK children. Free School Meals are offered to children based on household income. About 1 in 5 pupils do not take their Free School Meals. The CANTEEN study aims to find out what influences whether pupils in secondary schools in Northern Ireland and England take their Free School Meal, how Free School Meals are related to the quality of the food children eat and their food insecurity and whether changing who qualifies for Free School Meals would impact the food eaten and food insecurity. Understanding these things will help us to improve national Free School Meal policy. To understand this fully, however, we also need to understand the broader school food environment, how school meals are organised, the canteen setting, the school approach to food education and the culture of the school in relation to food, and healthy eating. All of these things are likely to influence school meal uptake in general, as well as uptake of Free School Meals. The findings of the CANTEEN study are intended directly to influence school food policy and practice for the future, with the ultimate aim of improving the nutritional intake of secondary school-aged children.

What the study involves:

- All pupils from the selected year groups (from year 8 and 11 in Northern Ireland (NI) and year 7 and 10 in England), regardless of their Free School Meal eligibility, will be asked to complete a questionnaire including information about their characteristics (full name, sex, date of birth, home postcode and ethnicity), Free School Meal eligibility and uptake, their usual school lunch arrangements, food offered in school, the school canteen, food education at school, school interaction with pupils, the food situation in their home (questions about food insecurity i.e. not having enough money to buy food), their physical activity, their fruit and vegetable intake and knowledge, their well-being (quality of life) and a dietary recall of their food and drink intake over a 24 hour period.
- Schools will be asked to complete a key pupil information form to provide some information on pupil's that take part (their educational attainment, whether they are eligible to receive Free School Meals, whether English is an additional language for them, and if they are registered as having any special educational needs). We are asking for this information in order to understand more about the relationship between different pupil characteristics and uptake of Free School Meals
- Parents/ guardians will be asked to complete a questionnaire about their child's Free School Meal eligibility and uptake and views on Free School Meals. We will also ask about food at home, their child's usual food choices, usual home food practices, including their own food choices, their nutrition knowledge and money spent on food as understanding their child's whole food situation is important for us to understand their food choices.

- School staff and Governors will be asked to complete a questionnaire to explore their views and experiences of School food and Free School Meals. Business managers and Caterers will be asked to complete a questionnaire and take part in an interview with the research team to gather information relating to the provision of school food and eating environments, the activities and facilities that the school has to support uptake of Free School Meals and the related costs that are incurred by the school.. School staff, Governors, Caterers and Business managers will be asked to provide their full name and email address if they wish to take part in a further element of the study (case study)
- Schools will be asked to provide some key data that is aggregated i.e. for the year group and not for individuals (on attendance, educational attainment, Free School Meal and documents and policies related to Free School Meals)
- Researchers will observe the school eating environment (i.e. the canteen) for one day
- Some schools will also be invited to participate in a case study. In these schools we will conduct interviews with school staff and parents and focus groups with pupils.

All schools who agree to take part in the study will be given £500 for their involvement. A further payment of £500 will be given to case study schools. Pupils who complete data collection will be offered a £5 Amazon voucher (for completion of the questionnaire and/or case study-based data collection), as a thank you for their participation. A £15 voucher will also be offered to parents who complete the questionnaire and another £15 will be offered to parents who take part in the case-study interview, with a further contribution made to the school for each parent questionnaire and parent interview completed (£5).

Should any schools withdraw prior to the start of data collection they will not receive any financial compensation. Should any schools withdraw part way through the data collection process, they will receive compensation proportional to the stage at which they withdraw from the data collection process.

Pupil vouchers (£5) will be distributed to pupils by schools. Parents will provide their name and email address at the end of the parent questionnaire for the research team to use for the purpose of distributing a voucher (£15) to them.

What to do next: Please read the attached sheet for further information on the study. If you agree to your school taking part, please return the attached form to canteenstudy@qub.ac.uk.

CANTEEN study School Participant Information Sheet

The CANTEEN study: Free School Meals, Diet Quality and Food Insecurity in Secondary School Pupils: a Mixed Methods Study

Your school is one of several in Northern Ireland (NI) and the Midlands invited to take part in the CANTEEN study.

1. What is the aim of this study?

Not having enough money to buy food is known as food insecurity and is common in UK children. Free School Meals are offered to children based on household income. About 1 in 5 pupils do not take their Free School Meals. The CANTEEN study aims to find out what influences whether pupils in secondary schools in Northern Ireland and England take their Free School Meal, how Free School Meals are related to the quality of the food children eat and their food insecurity and whether changing who qualifies for Free School Meals would impact the food eaten and food insecurity. Understanding these things will help us to improve national Free School Meal policy. To understand this fully, however, we also need to understand the broader school food environment, how school meals are organised, the canteen setting, the school approach to food education and the culture of the school in relation to food, and healthy eating. All of these things are likely to influence school meal uptake in general, as well as uptake of Free School Meals. The findings of the CANTEEN study are intended directly to influence school food policy and practice for the future, with the ultimate aim of improving the nutritional intake of secondary school-aged children.

2. What will the school have to do?

The study consists of several elements including pupil, parent/ guardian, school staff and governor questionnaires, assessment of pupil dietary intake, interview with the business manager and observation of the school eating environment.

If you agree for your school to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on behalf of the school outlining what is required of the school and of the researchers. You will be asked to provide some information on pupil's that take part in the study (their educational attainment, whether they are eligible to receive Free School Meals, whether English is an additional language for them, and if they are registered as having any special educational needs). You will be asked to provide some key pieces of data and documents to the researchers, such as school meal take-up data, school menus, catering contracts, and relevant school policies. You will be asked some questions about your school's catering arrangements, catering facilities, food education, school food management and governance, and the costs associated with these. A member of the research team will visit the school to observe the eating environments and school food provision across the school day. You will be asked to identify relevant staff members (including those in management, teaching and catering roles) and Governors to complete a questionnaire collecting their views on school food provision, Free School Meals and food education. You will also be asked to identify a 'liaison person' to be the main point of contact for the school with the research team.

Between September 2023 and June 2024, we ask you to select one class from each of the school years 8 and 11 to participate in the study. You will be asked to distribute study information to the parents of these children, and collect forms from parents who have opted for their child not to participate that are brought into school with pupils. For these classes, you will be asked to timetable two sessions, approximately 1 hour each, to give pupils with parental consent the opportunity to complete an online survey. Ideally, the classes will be scheduled between Tuesday and Friday within

the same week or within two consecutive weeks. A minimum of two research staff will support the data collection in each class. We ask for a teacher to be present during data collection. Additionally, pupils who take part in the study will be given a £5 Amazon voucher. The research team will provide the vouchers to the school and you will be asked to distribute the vouchers to pupils. Schools will also be asked to distribute a questionnaire to parents of participating pupils. Methods for distribution of parental questionnaires (e.g. hard copy, email, administered face-to-face or administered over the phone by a researcher or member of school administrative staff at each school will be agreed following school-specific consultation.

For schools invited to be 'case study' schools, pupils from these classes will also be asked to take part in a focus group to explore their views on barriers and facilitators for Free School Meal uptake. The case study data collection will take place between August 2024 and January 2025. The focus groups will take about 1 hour and will be facilitated by a trained researcher. Relevant staff members, caterers, business managers, governors and parents/ guardians will also be invited to take part in a one-to-one interview with a researcher, which will take approximately 30-45 minutes.

3. Parent opt-out process

We will use an opt-out process from parents for this study. Unless a parent returns an opt-out form, their child will be eligible to participate in the study. We will also ask pupils for their assent using an electronic form.

4. What are the benefits and risks of the school taking part in this study?

Schools will be provided with a summary of the data collected from their school, which may support any internal evaluation of school food. The process of collecting the views of pupils, staff and Governors will also provide an additional method for the school to ensure their voices on school food provision and food education are heard. All schools who take part in the study will be given £500 to cover the costs of their involvement. A further contribution will be made to the school for each parent questionnaire and parent interview completed (£5). A further payment of £500 will be given to case study schools. Parents who complete data collection will also be given a £15 Amazon voucher and pupils who complete data collection will be given a £5 Amazon voucher. An additional £15 and £5 voucher will be given to parents and pupils, respectively, taking part in focus groups/interviews.

Risks: We are collecting information on dietary intake, wellbeing (quality of life) and food insecurity (not having enough money to buy food). There is a small possibility that collection of this data may be a sensitive issue for some pupils. Any concerns identified by the research team through a child's responses to the questionnaires will be raised with the school to deal with in line with the schools established safeguarding procedures.

5. What if there is a problem?

If you have any concerns about any aspects of the study, you can contact the Chief Investigator, Professor Jayne Woodside (Telephone 028 9097 8942; Email j.woodside@qub.ac.uk). Should you remain unhappy and wish to make a formal complaint, you can contact the Research Governance Team at Queen's University Belfast (Telephone: 028 9097 2529; Email: researchgovernance@qub.ac.uk).

6. Will taking part in this study be kept confidential?

Information will be kept confidential, however, we will inform the school if a child's answers to questionnaires indicate that they may benefit from support in relation to food security and wellbeing so that the school can follow established safeguarding procedures in relation to this.

Study data (from questionnaires) will be collected via Qualtrics survey software. This will be downloaded by the research team and stored confidentially (anonymised using ID numbers) in a password protected database on a secure server at Queen's University Belfast. If questionnaires are completed using a paper copy, data will be entered onto Qualtrics survey software by the research team. All information will be removed from Qualtrics survey software when study analysis has been completed and checked. Paper copies of the questionnaire collected in England will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office in a secure building at the Institute of Applied Health Research, University of Birmingham. Paper copy data collected in Northern Ireland will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office (the Chief Investigators office, room 01.028, Institute of Clinical Sciences A) in a secure building at the Centre for Public Health, Queen's University Belfast. Identifiable information (consent forms) will be stored separately from other data (e.g. questionnaires). On completion of the study, paper copy data stored at the University of Birmingham temporarily during the study will be transferred securely and stored in the Chief Investigators office with the data from Northern Ireland.

The school will be asked to provide "Personal data and Sensitive Personal data" about pupil's taking part in the study by completing the Key Pupil Information form. This form will ask about pupil educational attainment, whether they are eligible to receive Free School Meals, whether English is an additional language for them, and if they are registered as having any special educational needs. Schools will provide this information to the research team via email in a password protected excel file. Alternatively, schools will provide this information to the research team face-to-face as a paper copy that will be temporarily stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office in a secure building at the Centre for Public Health, Queen's University Belfast or the Institute of Applied Health Research, University of Birmingham. Paper copies of this information will be entered onto excel by the research team and then the paper copy destroyed.

As part of the questionnaires, pupils, parents and school staff will be asked to provide information about themselves (e.g. Their age group or school year group). This information is known as "Personal data" and they will also be asked to provide information about themselves such as their gender identity and ethnicity. This information is known as "Sensitive Personal data". All pupils, parents and staff taking part will be informed of what Personal data and Sensitive Personal data is being collected, the purpose of this information being collected, how their information will be kept confidential and how long it will be stored for in the participant information sheets that will be provided to them. All personal data and Sensitive Personal data will be pseudonymised post collection and stored in a separate database to other study data. Only authorised members of the research team at Queen's University Belfast and the University of Birmingham will have access to Personal data and Sensitive Personal data.

Information in anonymised form (using ID numbers) may be shared with collaborating researcher institutions. In some instances, inspectors from regulatory authorities may need to access data for checking the quality of the research. Study documentation will be kept for 10 years from when the study has been completed to allow for full and final publication of the research results and will be held securely by the Chief Investigator. At the end of this period data that are no longer required will be securely destroyed.

This research will be conducted in compliance with data protection legislation. For more information about how we look after your information, how to access your rights and who to contact if you have any queries or concerns about data protection please visit the Queen's University Belfast website - www.qub.ac.uk/privacynotice/Research/ListofResearchPrivacyNotices/PrivacyNoticeforResearchParticipants.html

7. Who else is taking part?

There will be 32 schools across Northern Ireland and the Midlands taking part in the study, and a small number of these schools are taking part as 'case study' schools. In participating schools, pupils from two classes (from years 8 and 11 in Northern Ireland and years 7 and 10 in England) and parents/ guardians as well as relevant school teaching staff, caterers, business managers and governors will be invited to take part.

8. What happens at the end of the study?

A final report will be written at the end of the study and you will have the option of receiving a summary of this. The results of the study will also be published in scientific journals and reports for a variety of audiences, and presented at scientific conferences and meetings. Other researchers may be given access to the data but only in anonymised form - they will not be able to link this data to your school or any of the participants in any way.

9. Has this study been approved by an ethics committee?

Yes, this study has been approved by the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Queen's University Belfast.

10. What happens now if I decide for the school to take part?

If you decide that you want your school to take part in this study, please complete the attached form and email to: canteenstudy@qub.ac.uk

11. What happens if I change my mind about the school taking part in the study?

If you agree for your school to take part in the study, your school's participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. Your school's data can be withdrawn until August 2024 when the quantitative study data will be analysed.

12. What if I have more questions or do not understand something?

You can contact the research team at Queen's University Belfast (contact details below) to discuss any questions or concerns you have.

Contact for Further Information:

CANTEEN Study, Centre for Public Health, School of Medicine Dentistry & Biomedical Sciences, Institute of Clinical Science Block A, Grosvenor Road, Belfast BT12 6BJ.

Email: canteenstudy@qub.ac.uk

Researcher contact for all schools in Northern Ireland:

Dr Sarah Moore, CANTEEN study Research Fellow, Centre for Public Health, School of Medicine Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences, Queen's University Belfast, Institute of Clinical Science Block A, Grosvenor Road, Belfast BT12 6BJ.

Email: sarah.moore@qub.ac.uk

Tel: *Insert phone number*

Researcher contact for all schools in England:

Estera Sevel, CANTEEN study Research Associate, Institute of Applied Health Research, College of Medical and Dental Sciences, The University of Birmingham, Murray Learning Centre, Edgbaston B15 2TT.

Email: e.sevel@bham.ac.uk

Tel: 0121 414 2851 or 07729725735

CANTEEN study Chief Investigator

Professor Jayne Woodside, Centre for Public Health, School of Medicine Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences, Queen's University Belfast, Institute of Clinical Science Block B, Grosvenor Road, Belfast BT12 6BJ.

E-mail: j.woodside@qub.ac.uk

Tel: 028 9097 8942

THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING TAKING PART IN OUR STUDY.

PARTICIPATION RESPONSE FORM

If you would like more information, or are interested in participating, please copy and paste the relevant text below into your email response.

I would like to find out more about the CANTEEN Study.

The key school contact(s) for this study will be (please provide at least one contact):

Name:

Position:

Telephone/Email:

Please ask any questions you may have here:

Please send the completed form to the following email address: canteenstudy@gub.ac.uk

A member of the CANTEEN study team will be in contact with you in the next few days. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.