

# Education South West Primary Menu Review

## Final Status Report

September 2026

### Overall judgement

Education South West's two-week primary menu is a strong offer. It provides good variety, strong fruit and vegetable provision, meaningful pupil choice and a good balance of familiar dishes alongside opportunities for pupils to experience a wider range of flavours and ingredients.

The menu is largely scratch cooked, makes good use of wholegrains and pulses, includes oily fish provision and provides well-considered vegetarian and dietary alternatives.

Based on the menu, recipe information and supporting information supplied, no clear current School Food Standards compliance issue has been identified at menu level.

The menu also aligns strongly with Chefs in Schools best practice.

Against the proposed future School Food Standards, ESW is also well positioned. The only area currently rated Amber is pulses, due specifically to the proposed frequency requirements rather than the quality of the existing offer.

### Scope of review

This assessment considers ESW's two-week primary menu cycle, recipe calculator, nutritional information and supporting information provided by ESW.

It is a menu-level review rather than a full nutritional or allergen compliance audit which would involve verification of the nutritional components of each item, but the review has reference and considered the detailed nutritional information provided.

### Status summary

| AREA | CURRENT<br>SCHOOL<br>FOOD<br>STANDARDS | PROPOSED<br>FUTURE<br>STANDARDS | CIS BEST<br>PRACTICE | OVERALL VIEW |
|------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
|      |                                        |                                 |                      |              |

|                                   |          |          |         |                                                |
|-----------------------------------|----------|----------|---------|------------------------------------------------|
| Fruit and vegetables              | ● Green  | ● Green  | ● Green | Strong provision                               |
| Oily fish                         | ● Green  | ● Green  | ● Green | Appropriate provision within the menu cycle    |
| Fried/coated products             | ● Green  | ● Green  | ● Green | No outstanding concern identified              |
| Wholegrains                       | ● Green  | ● Green  | ● Green | Strong provision                               |
| Vegetarian provision              | ● Green  | ● Green  | ● Green | Strong and appropriate for ESW communities     |
| Pulses                            | ● Green  | ● Amber  | ● Green | Proposed standards require greater frequency   |
| Processed vegetarian alternatives | ● Green  | ● Green  | ● Green | Appropriate balance                            |
| Scratch cooking                   | N/A      | N/A      | ● Green | A strength of the offer                        |
| Desserts                          | ● Green  | ● Green* | ● Green | Strong provision                               |
| Operational practicality          | N/A      | N/A      | ● Green | Wider choice is supported by uptake            |
| Portion sizes                     | Guidance | Guidance | ● Green | Considered in the context of the complete meal |
| Nutritional data                  | N/A      | N/A      | ● Green | Supplier data and methodology are clear        |
| Dietary inclusion                 | ● Green  | ● Green  | ● Green | Strong provision                               |
| Value for money                   | N/A      | N/A      | ● Green | Strong overall offer at £3.20                  |

\*Based on the proposed standards as currently drafted and the intended ESW dessert offer.

## Overall position

Current School Food Standards: ● Green

**Proposed future School Food Standards:** ● Amber

**Chefs in Schools best practice:** ● Green

The proposed standards rating is Amber **solely because of the proposed pulse frequency requirements.**

## Current menu assessment

### Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetable provision is strong.

Vegetables are incorporated throughout the main menu, with additional salad and whole fruit available. The offer provides pupils with regular opportunities to eat a good variety of vegetables and fruit across the week.

### Oily fish

Oily fish provision is appropriate within the menu cycle.

Salmon is included through the tuna and salmon mix and salmon and sweet potato fishcake, providing accessible ways for primary-aged pupils to eat oily fish.

### Vegetarian provision and pulses

Vegetarian provision is strong, with a vegetarian option available each day and good use of vegetables, beans, chickpeas, lentils and other non-meat proteins.

The menu balances vegetarian provision with the needs and preferences of ESW's communities. Retaining a meat or fish option alongside vegetarian choices is reasonable given the feedback ESW has received from families.

There are several good examples of pulse-based dishes, including cauliflower and chickpea curry, bean and vegetable casserole and roasted vegetable and chickpea pitta.

### Wholegrains

Wholegrain and higher-fibre provision is strong.

The menu includes wholewheat pasta, wholemeal pitta and a brown and white rice mix, providing higher-fibre choices across the cycle.

### Scratch cooking

Scratch cooking is a strength of the ESW offer.

The menu is largely prepared from scratch, including sauces and gravy, and raw potato products are used rather than pre-cooked alternatives.

This supports ingredient control, food quality and chef skills within the kitchen teams.

## **Desserts**

The dessert offer is strong against the current standards, Chefs in Schools best practice and the proposed standards as currently drafted.

The menu includes one sweetened baked dessert each week, alongside options such as rice pudding, fruit and yoghurt.

ESW intends to provide one day each week where fresh fruit salad or whole fruit is the only dessert option.

Plain yoghurt served with fruit, or naturally sweetened with fruit, is also consistent with current Chefs in Schools practice.

Where a dessert requires an accompanying portion of fruit, this should be fresh or whole fruit rather than juice, smoothie or fruit purée.

The final requirements should be checked again once the new School Food Standards are confirmed.

## **Portions and nutritional balance**

ESW has considered portions in the context of the complete meal rather than assessing individual components in isolation.

DfE portion sizes are typical guidance rather than fixed limits. It is therefore appropriate to consider portioning alongside overall energy and nutritional balance, pupil age and appetite, uptake and food waste.

Continued monitoring of these areas should form part of normal menu management.

## **Nutritional data**

The nutritional information used within ESW's calculator is derived from supplier information, providing a sound basis for menu planning.

The use of the term "estimated free sugars" appropriately reflects the limitations of supplier nutritional information.

# **Operational delivery**

The ESW menu provides a broad range of choices, including main meals, jacket potatoes, deli and salad options.

This creates more production routes than a streamlined two-main menu, but ESW's uptake data demonstrates clear demand for the wider offer:

- approximately 70% main meals
- 14% jacket potatoes
- 14% deli or full salads

Retaining these choices therefore appears appropriate for the communities served.

The focus should remain on efficient production through shared ingredients, aligned dishes, sensible mise en place and continued monitoring of uptake and waste.

Dietary provision has also been considered carefully, with dairy-free, gluten-free and vegan alternatives available according to need.

## Value for money

At £3.20, the ESW lunch offer represents good value given the breadth and quality of provision.

The offer includes a main meal alongside salad, bread, fruit or dessert and drinks, together with jacket, deli and full salad alternatives and dietary provision.

The level of scratch cooking, vegetables, wholegrains and menu variety further supports the overall value of the offer.

This is an assessment of the overall menu offer rather than a detailed recipe-costing review.

## Proposed future School Food Standards

The current School Food Standards remain the requirements ESW must meet today. The proposed standards should therefore be treated as future-proofing until the final requirements are confirmed.

ESW is already well positioned across most of the proposed areas.

## Pulses

Pulses are the only area currently rated **Amber against the proposed standards**.

This does not indicate poor pulse provision. ESW already makes good use of beans, chickpeas and lentils.

The Amber relates specifically to the proposed frequency requirements, which as currently drafted would require:

- pulses to be the main protein source in vegetarian menu options three times each week
- at least one portion of pulses, excluding baked beans, within or alongside all menu options on one day each week

The current menu contains good pulse-based dishes, but does not yet clearly demonstrate both of these requirements in each week.

If ESW wishes to future-proof the menu before the standards are confirmed, this does not require pulses to be added indiscriminately to every recipe.

They can be incorporated where appropriate, for example:

- using blended white beans to replace part of a béchamel or white sauce
- incorporating lentils into suitable sauces and meat dishes
- providing a bean, chickpea or lentil salad or side alongside all menu options on one day

Used appropriately, pulses can support fibre, nutritional quality and potentially food cost as well as meeting the proposed requirements.

Until the final standards are confirmed, this should be viewed as a **future-proofing opportunity rather than a current requirement**.

## Ongoing recommendations

The menu is in a strong position. We recommend that ESW:

1. **Continues building on its existing use of pulses**, particularly if it wishes to prepare early for the proposed future requirements.
2. **Continues monitoring portions, uptake and food waste** as part of normal menu management.
3. **Maintains its strong approach to scratch cooking, oily fish, wholegrains, fruit and vegetables.**
4. **Continues gathering feedback from pupils, families and kitchen teams** as the menu is delivered.
5. **Reviews the menu against the final new School Food Standards once these are confirmed.**

## Final assessment

Overall, ESW's primary menu is in a strong position.

Based on the information reviewed, no clear current School Food Standards compliance issue has been identified at menu level, and the menu aligns well with Chefs in Schools best practice.

ESW is also well positioned against the proposed future standards. The only area requiring further consideration is the proposed frequency of pulses, which is a future-proofing point rather than an issue with the current menu.

Overall, the offer is varied, largely scratch cooked, nutritionally considered, provides meaningful choice and reflects the needs of the communities ESW serves.