

The Canteen health check will guide your school through some self-analysis. By objectively considering the situation, you can identify the most important issues impacting on your canteen and then begin considering possible courses of action.

Size of your market

- How many students are enrolled at your school?
- What is the social demographic of your school?
- What proportion of your students use the canteen regularly?
- How many staff are at the school and how many staff use the canteen regularly?

Can you increase the size of your market?

- Why don't more students use the canteen? What can you change?
- Why don't more staff use the canteen? What can you change?
- Are there catering opportunities within the school?
- Can you provide a canteen service to a nearby school?

Staffing

- How many paid staff do you have and what are their hours?
- How many regular volunteers do you have?
- How can you increase the pool of volunteers?

Menu

- Consider the recess menu, is everything popular?
- Consider the lunch menu, can choices be streamlined?
- The more items you offer, the higher your costs for stock and labour
- Does your menu offer variety and interest by changing between summer and winter or offering specials

Canteen operations and efficiency

- How many days per week does the canteen operate?
- Is your menu realistic given the preparation time you have?
- Is your canteen purchasing through wholesale suppliers as much as possible?
- Does your canteen have its own computer, printer and internet access?
- Have you considered online ordering?

Financial controls

- Does your canteen have a Treasurer? (Or, a canteen manager who fulfills that role)
- What are your daily takings? Yearly takings?
- What are your average daily expenses? Yearly expenses?
- Do you know the cost price of every single item you purchase?
- Do you use a formula for calculating the selling price of all items?

Collaboration with the school and the community

- Does the canteen manager and the canteen committee have a good relationship with the Principal, and the office manager?
- Is your canteen able to communicate with the parents via the school newsletter, website or social media?
- Is your canteen able to use the school photocopier and any other such resources if needed?
- Is your canteen kept informed, or easily able to find out, what's going on around the school?
- Have you done a survey recently about the school community's perception of the canteen and if it is meeting the wants/needs?

Canteen premises

- List all the equipment you have, its condition and estimate its age. Consider what is likely to need replacing in the future
- Make a list of equipment you don't have but would like
- What does the canteen look like? Is it clean, freshly painted, neat and functional? Make a list of improvements needed
- Is the canteen located centrally, where students, parents and staff can easily see it?
- Is the canteen safe?
- Is the canteen secure?

Take action

There are usually a number of factors that lead to a canteen being in trouble. In general, one or a combination of the solutions below may help.

- a) Review and/or implement a canteen policy
- b) Review the number of days the canteen trades; consider reducing
- c) Reduce the number of items on the menu
- d) Don't waste staff time, especially when you have to pay for it:
 - Get things delivered rather than going to the supermarket. This may mean you need to invest in an additional freezer, so that your orders are large enough to meet the suppliers' minimum requirements for delivery
 - Design forms for all repetitive tasks – shopping lists, lunch order counts, stock-takes, daily takings records, ordering, rosters, etc.
 - Invest in a computer and printer for the canteen, preferably with internet access
 - Work with the canteen committee to share the workload, where appropriate - especially the Treasurer's work, unless you are able and willing to pay for it
 - Purchase and cook in bulk. Think about multiple uses for the same ingredients and the same packaging, to maximize economies of scale e.g. you may offer a pasta/bolognese dish, but you can also use the same bolognese mix as a topping on a jacket potato, toasted jaffle, chilli con carne, tacos or lasagne
- e) It is essential to understand your costs, your costing requirements and to monitor this continually. You need to use a formula specific to your canteens overheads
- f) Marketing is important. Continually promote good news stories about your canteen to the school community
- g) Make your special lunch orders truly special. Create a culture in which people are always interested to know what the canteen is going to do next
- h) For Primary Schools: think about what is going to be easy and appealing for the parents (they are the ones who decide and pay for lunch orders). The system for ordering needs to be quick and easy for them. Online ordering is taking off for precisely this reason: it suits the parents!
- i) For High Schools: think about the different attitudes and needs of boys versus girls about food. Boys are hungry. They need filling with nutritious food from the core food groups. Girls are interested in what's fresh, and often choose salads, wraps and or one-fork meals. Do not underestimate the ability of high school students to pay a fair price. They often have a high degree of financial independence.

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