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Research report

When chefs adopt a school? An evaluation of a cooking intervention in English primary schools

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Abstract

This article sets out the findings from research on the impact of a, UK based, chefs in schools teaching programme on food, health, nutrition and cookery. Professional chefs link with local schools, where they deliver up to three sessions to one class over a year. The research measured the impact of a standardised intervention package and changes in food preparation and consumption as well as measuring cooking confidence. The target group was 9–11 year olds in four schools. The main data collection method was a questionnaire delivered 2 weeks before the intervention and 2 weeks afterwards. There was a group of four matched control schools. Those taking part in the intervention were enthused and engaged by the sessions and the impact measures indicated an intention to change. There were gains in skills and confidence to prepare and

ask for the ingredients to be purchased for use in the home. Following the session with the chef, the average reported cooking confidence score increased from 3.09 to 3.35 (by 0.26 points) in the intervention group – a statistically significant improvement. In the control group this change was not statistically significant. Children’s average reported vegetable consumption increased after the session with the chef, with the consumption score increasing from 2.24 to 2.46 points (0.22 points) again, a statistically significant increase with no significant changes in the control group. The research highlights the need to incorporate evaluation into school cooking initiatives as the findings can provide valuable information necessary to fine-tune interventions and to ensure consistency of the healthy eating messages.

Highlights

– The short intervention did bring about changes in attitude and behaviour. – For some the shortness of the intervention left them feeling less confident. – A key concern was standardising the nutrition message delivered by the chefs. – The cooking confidence scores showed an improvement in four different skill sets. – There was a smaller increase in cooking confidence in pupils from deprived areas.



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Keywords

Cooking; Vegetable consumption; Cooking confidence; Culinary nutrition

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