

# Food for Thought Lewisham

Children and Young People's Healthy Eating - Lewisham





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# Contents



## What is Healthwatch Lewisham?

We are one of 152 local Healthwatch organisations that were established throughout England in 2013, under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. The dual role of local Healthwatch is to champion the rights of users of health and social care services and to hold the system to account for how well it engages with the public.

Our remit as an independent health and social care watchdog is to be the voice of local people and ensure that health and social care services are safe, effective and designed to meet the needs of patients, social care users and carers.

We give children, young people and adults in Lewisham a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are purchased, provided and reviewed within the borough.

Our core functions are:

1. Gathering the views and experiences of service users, carers, and the wider community,
2. Making people's views known,
3. Involving locals in the commissioning process for health and social care services, and process for their continual scrutiny,
4. Referring providers of concern to Healthwatch England, or the CQC, to investigate,
5. Providing information about which services are available to access and signposting,
6. Collecting views and experiences and communicating them to Healthwatch England,
7. Working with the Health and Wellbeing board in Lewisham on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Joint Health and Wellbeing strategy (which will influence the commissioning process).



## Strategic Drivers

Our role is to support the voices and views of the local community and to ensure their opinions are taken into account when services are commissioned.

We engaged the local community and spoke to people of all ages and backgrounds to ask them what they believed should be the priorities for children and young people for us to investigate in the upcoming year. It was evident from feedback received that young people's understanding of healthy eating was a major issue for our organisation to create a piece of work around.

In Lewisham, children and young people (0-19 years) make up 25 per cent of the population. The borough has a high proportion of children identified at risk of obesity; two years data from the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) reveal that the prevalence of obesity for children in both Reception (aged 4-5 years) and Year 6 (aged 10-11) years were significantly higher than the England average<sup>1</sup>. Public Health England reported in 2017 that Lewisham scores red on the RAG scale regarding childhood obesity (year six) with a local value of 24.4, whilst the England average is 19.8<sup>2</sup>.

We set out to speak to as many children as possible. As well as summer engagement which consisted of surveying children and their parents, every primary school in Lewisham was invited to take part in a workshop entitled Food for Thought. We were interested in learning what knowledge the children had around healthy eating and to also raise awareness. To do this we used Public Health guidance to focus on:

- The Eatwell Guide
- Sugar levels
- Salt levels

- Intake of water
- The importance of exercise
- The 5 a day message

This report presents the findings that emerged through our engagement. The recommendations that are provided, were led by the young people themselves and are included to support decision making and commissioning of services for them.

This report will be shared with the Lewisham Health and Wellbeing Board, the schools that participated, the Lewisham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Public Health Lewisham, NHS England and Healthwatch England, The London Borough of Lewisham's Children and Young People Senior Commissioning Manager and the Voluntary and Community Sector.



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- 1 *Lewisham JSNA*
  - 2 *Public Health England 4/7/2017*





## Methodology

This report documents the findings of the research, which took place during the summer of 2017 in the form of surveys, as well as a number of workshops which were delivered to different schools in the borough from October 2017 to February 2018. This report aims to identify what knowledge the children have around healthy eating.

Our summer engagement comprised of two surveys, one for parents and one for young people. The workshop was delivered to nine different schools, each school requested multiple sessions which were presented to different year groups. The workshop itself was split into six sections which consisted of the following:

- 1) **Food is fuel:** This section looked at the importance of food being fuel for our bodies and what happens if we over and under eat.
- 2) **The Food Plate:** The children got into groups and using plastic food, were asked to separate the food into the different sections of the food plate. These were then explored.
- 3) **Sugar:** The children were shown visual materials such as the measurement of how much free sugar they should have per day and how much is in a bottle of Coca-Cola.
- 4) **Water:** This section looked at the importance of drinking water, how to tell if you're not having enough and the recommended daily allowance.
- 5) **Salt:** The children were shown what their daily recommended salt allowance looks like and what the long term effects of too much salt can be.
- 6) **Exercise:** This part of the workshop looked into the importance and benefits of exercise.

In total, we spoke to 1,012 Lewisham residents during this project. This includes 134 parents and carers and 124 children during the summer engagement, with the remaining 754 children taking part in the workshops.





# Summer Engagement

258 responses (134 adults and 124 children) were gathered during the course of the summer engagement. The children were asked various questions via a survey about their eating habits and physical activity levels.

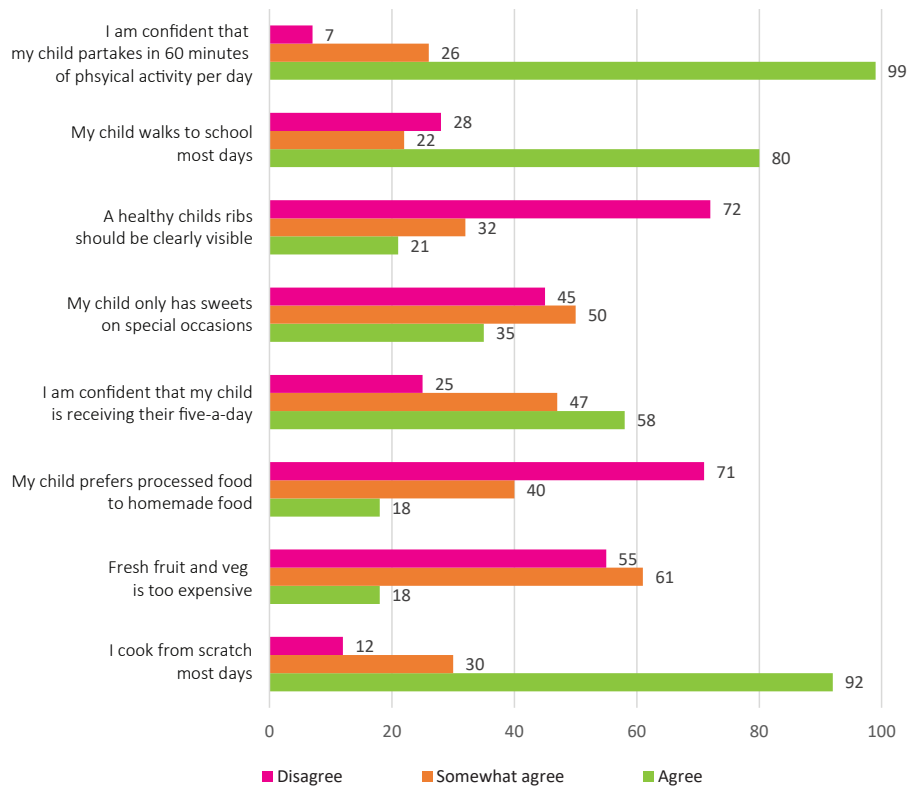
Some of the findings from this work were:

- 43% of the children surveyed said that they walk to school every day,
- 6% said they never have breakfast
- Only 18% of the children surveyed say they have their five-a-day.

The children that filled out the surveys ranged in age from 3 to sixteen years. 36% of respondents were male. In addition, 134 parents and carers filled out their own questionnaire. Below are the results.

As we can see from the data collected, parents and carers are generally confident that their children have good eating habits, with 80% agreeing or somewhat agreeing that their child/ren have their five-a-day – quite a stark difference to the children’s survey. 96% of parents and carers are confident that their child/ren get sixty minutes of physical exercise a day.

52% of those adults surveyed believe that a healthy child’s ribs should not be visible, however Mary Rudolf, an obesity expert, points out that a healthy ten-year old’s ribs should indeed be clearly visible but acknowledges that this is not always common knowledge<sup>3</sup>. Parents and carers were often shocked when this was revealed to them.



3 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-12226744>



## Food for Thought Workshops

**754 responses** were gathered during the course of the workshops.

As previously mentioned, the workshops were split into six sections. We tried to make these as interactive and interesting as possible. A PowerPoint presentation was used throughout. We used plastic food and copies of the food plate which were given out for the children to interact with. We also used visual tools, such as empty fizzy drink bottles which showed how much sugar was in each drink.

The first section looked at the Food is Fuel concept. The children were asked questions such as “What happens when an aeroplane doesn’t have enough fuel?” and “What happens when an aeroplane is overloaded?” It was explained that this is the same concept as the human body. We need enough food (fuel) to function but too much can make us put on weight and have negative consequences.

Next the children were put into groups and given plastic food and a copy of the food plate. They were asked to place the plastic food on the section of the food plate where they thought it should go (Fruit and vegetables, Starchy carbohydrates, Proteins, Dairy and alternatives and Oil and spreads.)

Once the task had been completed, we discussed where the food actually belonged. There was often surprise amongst the children when they discovered that a lot of the food that they were given didn’t actually belong on the food plate at all, for example; chocolate, cakes, French fries, sweets etc. It was explained that while it was okay to have these types of food occasionally, they have no nutritional value. A number of children were especially surprised that chocolate didn’t belong in the dairy section. We also



informed them that they should only drink a small cup of fruit juice a day as when fruits are juiced the sugar becomes free sugar and can lead to tooth decay and weight gain. The 5-a-day message was also relayed, with it being clarified to the children that fruit and vegetables can be fresh, frozen, tinned or dried and all count towards their 5-a-day.

Section three focused on the consumption of sugar. The children were shown what 24g of free sugar looks like and told that it was their recommended daily allowance. In comparison, they were also shown empty bottles of fizzy drinks which had been filled with how much free sugar they contain. There was often astonishment at how much sugar fizzy drinks contain, particularly a 500ml bottle of Coca-Cola (54g). Different names of sugar were also discussed and how food and drink labels can be misleading.

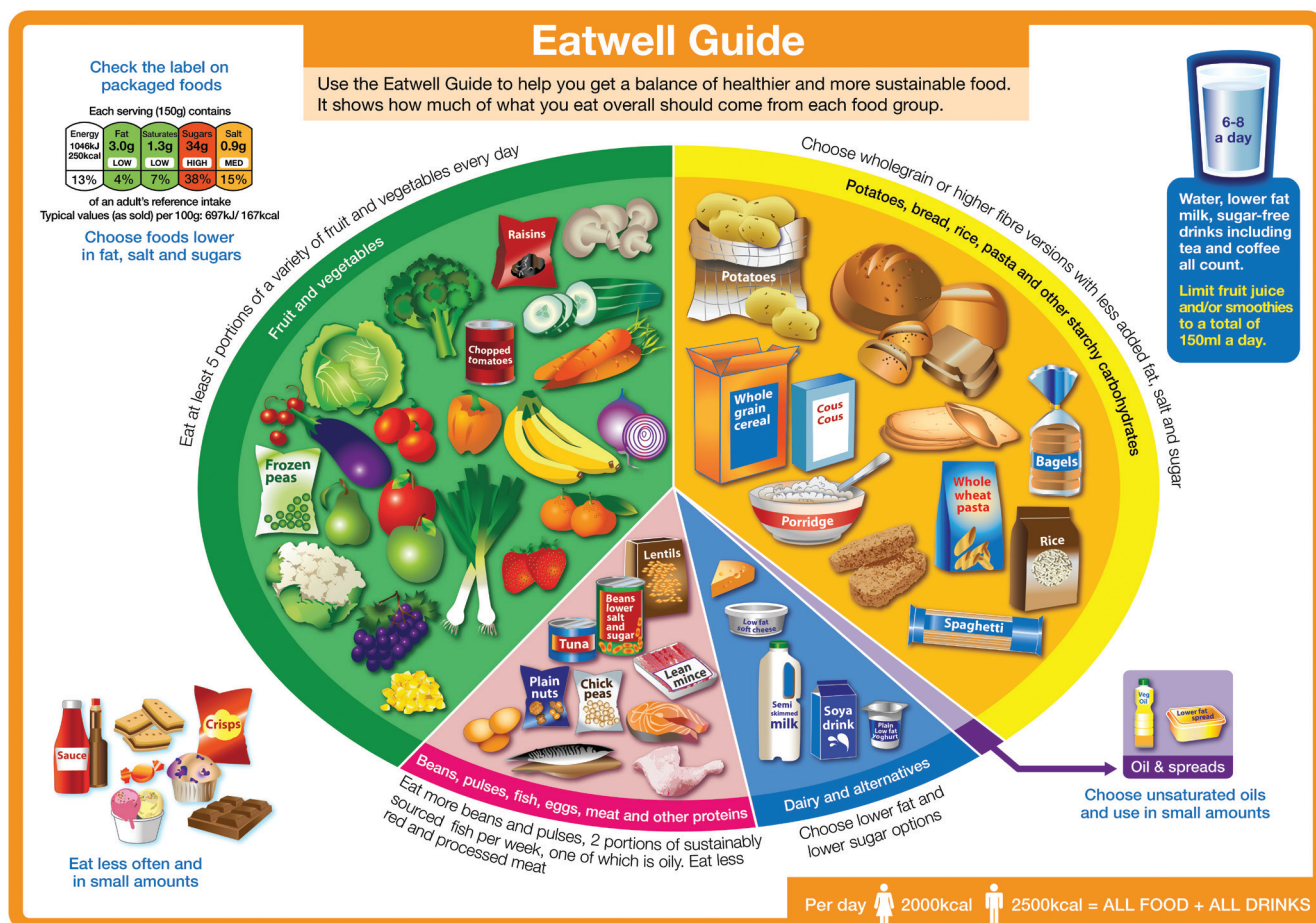




The children were then asked how many cups of water they thought that they should be drinking per day. Suggestions ranged from two to twenty. The participants were told that six to eight cups was the recommended daily allowance. The benefits of drinking water was then discussed and how to tell if you're not drinking enough.

Dangers of salt was the next topic that was discussed. The children were shown what 5g of salt looks like (their recommended daily allowance.) We also spoke about the dangers of too much salt and hidden salt in food.

Exercise was the final subject covered in the workshop. The students were asked to guess how many minutes of exercise they should be doing per day. Guesses averaged at 30 minutes. The children were often shocked when they were told that they should be doing 60 minutes of exercise per day. We then discussed the importance of exercise which can help with our physical and mental health. During the Food for Thought workshops, the participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire in order to gauge their thoughts around healthy eating and exercise.



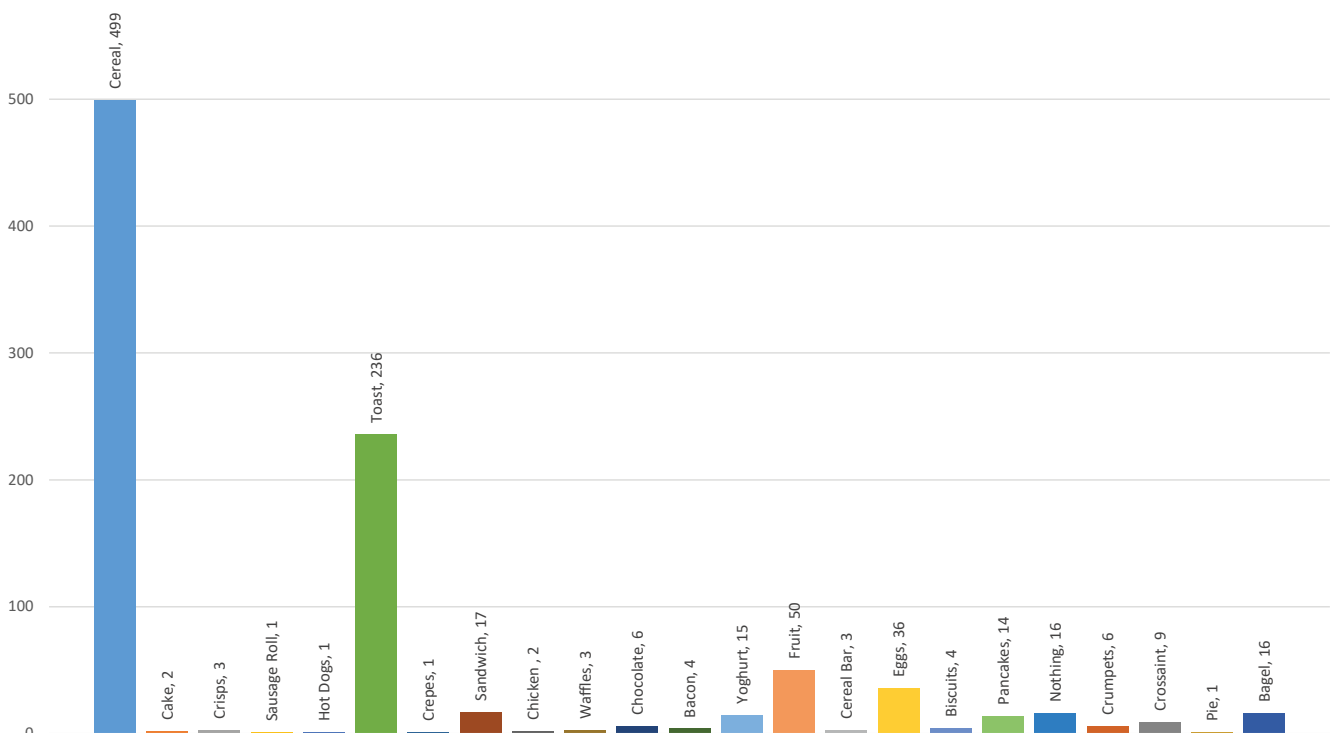
Source: Public Health England in association with the Welsh Government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland

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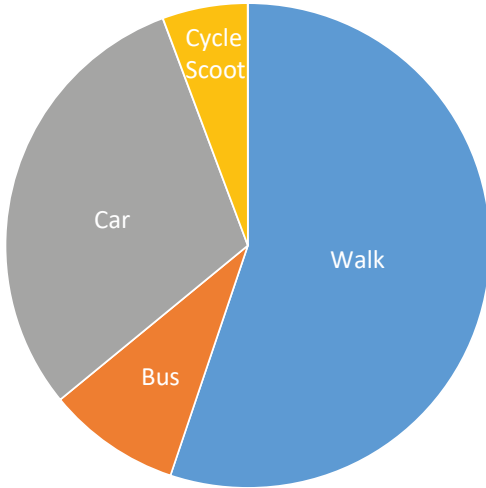


# Findings

## What do you have for breakfast?

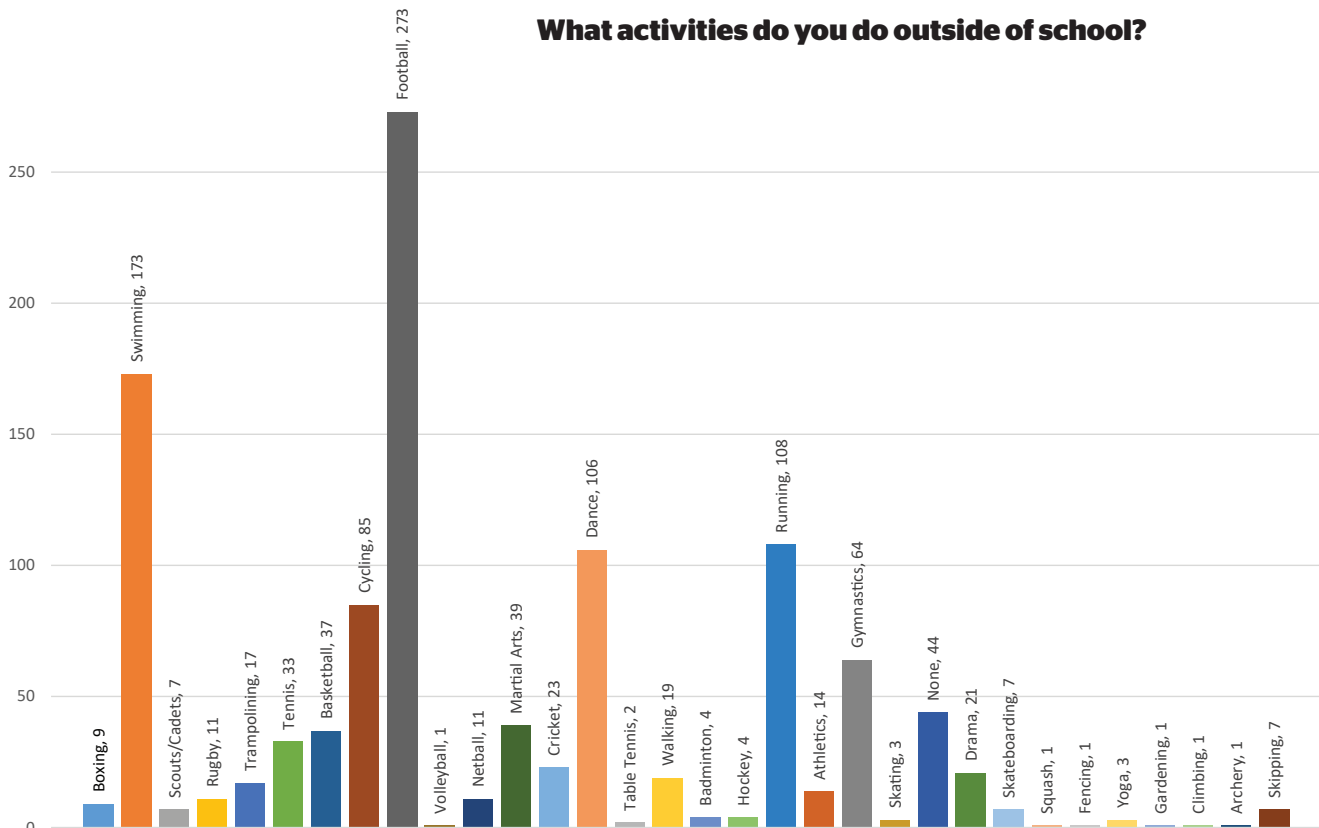


As we can see from the above chart, cereal was the most popular choice in terms of breakfast. Lots of children indicated that they ate porridge, but there were some that eat more sugary cereals. Sixteen children said that they do not eat breakfast, with a small percentage disclosing that their breakfast consists of foods such as chocolate and crisps. The importance of eating a healthy breakfast was stressed and the children were reminded that they needed their “fuel” not just for physical activity, but for their concentration. Some children chose more than one option for breakfast.



### How do you get to school?

The chart shows that nearly 61% of the children surveyed, walk, scoot or cycle to school, whilst 30% are driven and 9% take the bus. Some of the children who received a lift to school said that they lived too far from school from their house to walk.



### What activities do you do outside of school?

As we can see from the above chart, football proved to be the most popular activity with 273 children playing regularly. Swimming was second with 173 children. Also popular was running (108), dance (106), cycling (85) and gymnastics (64). Unfortunately, 44 children told us that they did not do any activities outside of school. The children were reminded that they should be doing at least 60 minutes of exercise a day which would help them to stay fit, healthy and happy.



For the questionnaire, the children were told how to measure portion sizes, then asked how many portions of fruit and vegetables they believe they eat in one day. 45% of those surveyed said that they eat 5 or more a day. 8% said they have one portion and 5% of children said they didn't eat any fruit or vegetables.

On the subject of water, 51% of those surveyed said they drink the daily recommended allowance or more. 2% of children said they didn't drink any water, 4% said they drink one cup a day and 7% said they had two.

When surveyed about how often the participants eat take-away and fast food; the results were as follows: Rarely 27%, Monthly 11%, Fortnightly 10%, Weekly 30%, More Often 22%. Additionally 53 children out of the 754 children claimed that they do not have regular visits to the dentist.

At the end of the session, the students were asked what they had learned during the workshop. Popular answers included:

- How to stay healthy
- To cut down on sugar and salt
- To do 60 minutes of exercise a day
- To drink more water
- About the different types of sugars
- Fats and oils
- To check food labels
- About the different food groups
- The 5-a-day message
- About Diabetes Type 2
- About sugars in fizzy drinks
- About the Eatwell guide

The participants were also asked what may stop their peers from eating healthily and exercising. Some of the reasons that the children came up with included being addicted to junk food, enticing packaging and smells, that healthy food can be expensive, being too busy studying to exercise, being too lazy, spending too much time on gaming/ the internet and going to parties. Some children also pointed out that those with physical disabilities or who are ill may find it difficult to exercise.



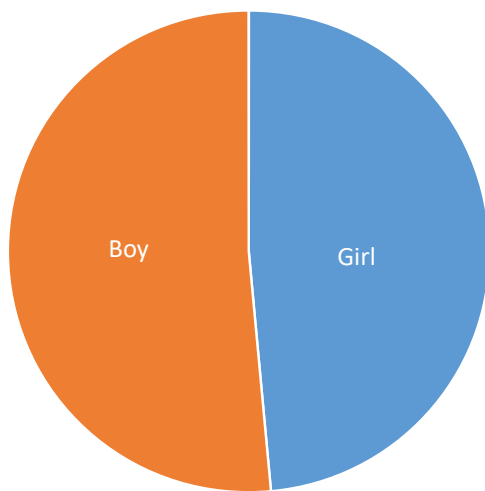


# Demographics

The demographics of the children surveyed were as follows:

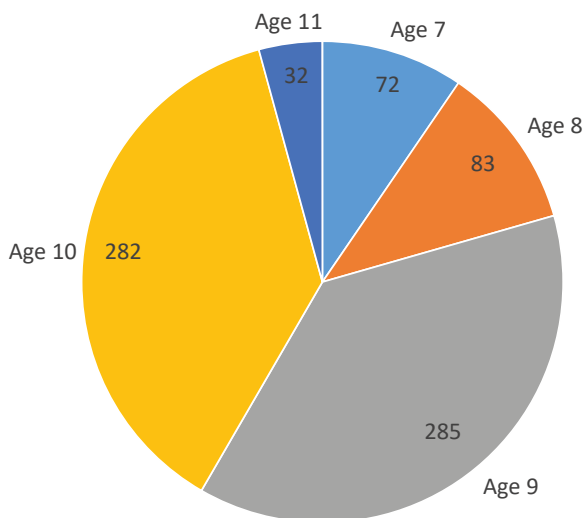
See below for a breakdown in ethnicity of the children who took part in the workshops.

## Gender of participants

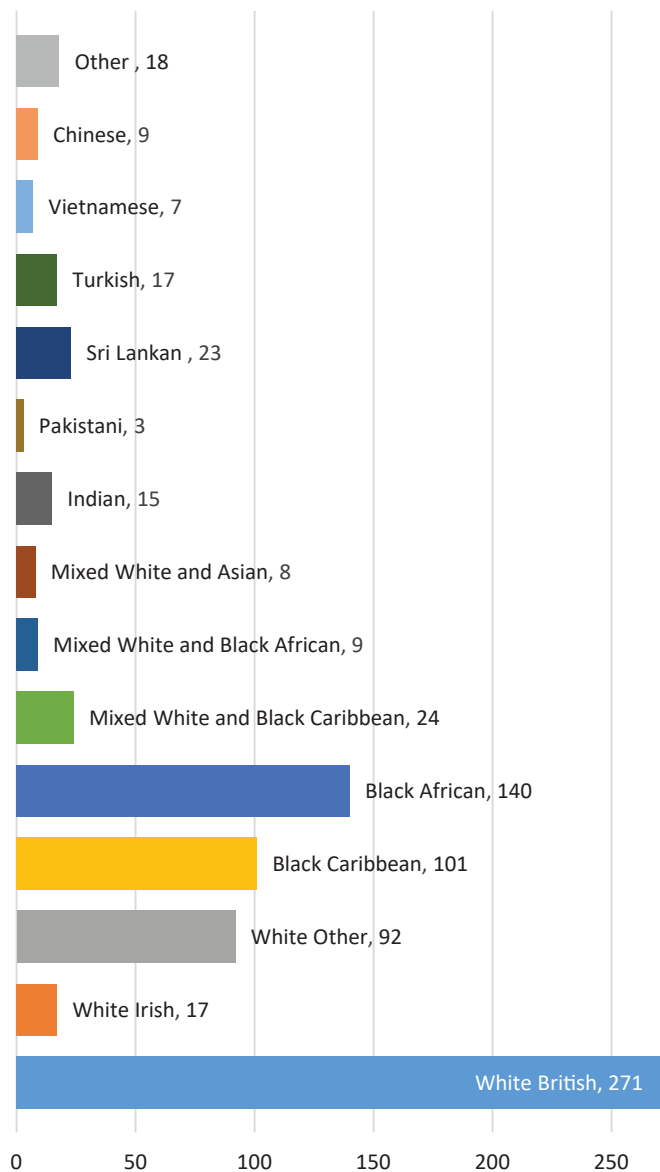


The genders of the participants was almost equally split with 365 girls and 387 boys taking part. Their ages are charted below.

## Age of participants



## How would you describe your ethnicity?







## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on what we learned from the children at the workshops, we feel that there could be a big advantage to educating young children about healthy eating in order to help combat health problems in later life. There was often surprise at the amounts of sugar and salts in foods and many of the children didn't know how to read labels to find nutritional value and the content of fats, salt and sugars. It could be also worth holding sessions with parents and teaching assistants to help reinforce healthy eating habits - especially in areas of high deprivation.

Therefore we recommend the following:

- All school children to be educated around healthy eating as an ongoing project - not a one off session.
- Schools to allow children to bring in water and fruit in to have during lesson times - this would encourage children who may not drink much water or eat much fruit to do so.
- Schools to be encouraged to join the Lewisham Sugar Smart scheme.
- Schools to review their packed lunch and dinner time policies.
- Schools to be encouraged to take part in the Daily Mile initiative.
- School children should be weighed and measured in secondary school as well as primary school.



## Outcomes

Since running this project we have already seen two positive outcomes from two different schools.

- Sir Francis Drake School have reviewed their packed lunch and dinner policies in order to make it healthier.
- Athelney School are going to allow pupils to bring bottled water into class.
- Various schools have spoken about our workshop in their newsletters.



# Appendix 1: Questionnaire

## Food For Thought Survey – Schools

Age  Gender  Ethnicity

What do you usually eat for breakfast?

How do you get to school?

What activities do you do outside of school?

How many portions of fruit and veg do you eat a day?

How many cups of water do you drink a day?

Do you go to the dentist?

How many times a week do you have fast food/takeaways?

What is something that you have learned today?

What might stop you and your friends from eating healthily and exercising?



## Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Lewisham would like to thank all the people that took part in this project including all the children and staff at the following primary schools:

- All Saints
- Athelney
- Dalmain
- Fairlawn
- Horniman
- Sir Francis Drake
- St George's CE
- St John the Baptist
- Torridon Juniors.

# ***Food for Thought Lewisham***

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First published April 2018

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