



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



## INFORMATION SHEET FOR SCHOOL

### CANTEEN STUDY PHASE 2 – CASE STUDY

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

Dear [Headteacher],

We are conducting **Phase 2** of the CANTEEN research study to explore more about how effective the current UK Free School Meal policy is. This part of the study runs from November 2024 to February 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 Meal. The CANTEEN study aims to find out a) what influences whether pupils in secondary schools in Northern Ireland and England take their Free School Meal, b) how Free School Meals are related to the quality of the food children eat and their food insecurity and c) 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. Therefore, we would greatly appreciate your school's input, by taking part in this second phase of the CANTEEN study which will involve gathering more detailed information about food in school via focus group discussions with pupils and interviews with parents and members of school staff.

#### **What the study involves for your school:**

- Pupils from selected year groups (from year 9 and 12 in Northern Ireland (NI) and year 8 and 11 in England), regardless of their Free School Meal eligibility, will be asked to take part in a focus group discussion to explore views on school food and how pupils from different backgrounds or needs may think about and access school food differently. Pupils will also be asked about their thoughts on the school canteen, food education at school and food in general. Each focus group will last up to 1.5 hours and will be facilitated by the research team. The focus group will include an ice-breaker activity followed by a semi-structured focus group discussion.

- Parents/ guardians will be invited to take part in an interview to explore views on school meals in general as well as Free School Meals (if applicable). They will also be asked about food at home, their child's usual food choices and usual home food practices.
- Senior leaders, teachers, other school staff and Governors will be invited to take part in an interview to explore their views and experiences of School food, Free School Meals and the wider school environment.
- School caterers and business managers will be invited to take part in an interview. The caterer interview will explore views on school meal provision in the Canteen, Free School Meals and the canteen environment while the business manager interview will include questions about views on school food and budgets, Free School Meals and the wider school environment.

All schools who agree to take part in the Case study will be given £500 for their involvement. Pupils who take part in the focus group will be offered a £5 shopping voucher, as a thank you for their participation. A £15 voucher will also be offered to parents who take part in an interview, with a further contribution made to the school for each 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 be asked to provide their email address to the research team after they complete the consent form. The research team will then be able to send a £15 voucher directly to each parent after the interview has been completed.

**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 MoU to [canteenstudy@gub.ac.uk](mailto:canteenstudy@gub.ac.uk).

## **CANTEEN study School Participant Information Sheet – CASE STUDY**

### **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 second phase of the CANTEEN study (the CASE 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 focus groups and interviews with parents/guardians, school staff, governors, catering manager and business manager.

If you agree for your school to take part in phase 2 of 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. Members of the research team will visit the school to carry out focus group discussions with the selected pupils. The purpose of the focus groups is to explore pupil's views on barriers and facilitators for Free School Meal uptake. A suitable date/time for the focus groups to be held will be agreed with you in advance of the school visit. You will be asked to identify relevant staff members (including those in management, teaching and catering roles) and Governors to take part in an interview collecting their views on barriers and facilitators on provision of school food and free school meals. You will also be asked to identify a 'liaison person' to be the main point of contact for the school with the research team.

Pupils who took part in the previous phase of data collection were also asked within their questionnaire to indicate whether they would like to take part in a follow-up focus group about school food. We would like to invite these pupils to take part in the focus group discussion. We may also ask you to select additional pupils from (*insert 8 and 11 if administering in England or 9 and 12 if administering in NI*). For these additional pupils, we will also need to know some information about them including their gender, ethnicity, age, SEN status and whether they are eligible to receive Free School Meals. We would like approx. 30 pupils to take part. You will be asked to distribute study information to these pupils and parents of these pupils either through an online link or in paper format. If a parent does not want their child to take part they can complete an 'opt out' form which will be included as part of the online link; alternatively, for parents who complete the 'opt out' form in paper format, we ask you to request for the completed 'opt out' form to be returned to the school. This is only required from parents who do not wish their child to participate in the study.

For pupils who have received passive parental consent, you will be asked to timetable four sessions with pupils in each session (Year 9 - 1 session with FSM eligible pupils, 1 session with non-FSM eligible pupils; Year 12 – 1 session with FSM eligible pupils, 1 session with non-FSM eligible pupils). Each session will take approximately 1.5 hours, to give pupils the opportunity to take part in the focus group. The focus groups can be scheduled any day, either within the same week or within two consecutive weeks. A minimum of two trained research staff (all with completed background checks) will facilitate each focus group session. We ask for a teacher to be present in the classroom during the focus group sessions. Each focus group will be audio recorded (parents and pupils will be informed about this in advance, within their information sheet). Additionally, pupils who take part in the focus group discussion will be given a £5 shopping voucher. The research team will provide the vouchers to the school and you will be asked to distribute the vouchers to pupils.

The school may also be asked to distribute the information sheet and consent forms to parents of pupils from the participating year groups to invite them to take part in the parent interview. The parent interview can be conducted in-person, by telephone or online (via Microsoft Teams). Methods for distribution of parent information sheets and consent forms 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. Parents will also have the option of completing the consent form via an online link which will be provided with the information sheet. Each parent interview will be audio recorded.

Relevant staff members, caterers, business managers, governors and parents/ guardians will also be sent an information sheet inviting them to take part in a one-to-one interview with a researcher, which will take approximately 60-90 minutes. Each staff interview will be audio recorded.

All of the audio recordings will be typed up for research purposes. The typed transcripts will not contain any names and will be labelled with unique study numbers. All recordings will be destroyed once the information has been analysed by the research team.

The case study data collection will take place between November 2024 and February 2025.

### **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 online in advance or in person prior to the focus group discussion. As part of this, pupils will be asked a question about their usual lunch behaviour.

### **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 interview completed (£5). Parents who take part in the interview will also be given a £15 shopping voucher and pupils who take part in the focus group discussion will be given a £5 shopping voucher.

Risks: We are collecting information on 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 individuals. Any concerns identified by the research team will be raised with the school to deal with in line with the schools established safeguarding procedures. The pupil focus group sessions will take place during school hours and will be planned to cause the least possible disruption to classes.

## **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](mailto: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](mailto: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.

As part of the pupil focus group, pupils will be asked to provide their name. Parents will also be asked to provide their name and their child's full name at the start of the parent interview. This information is known as "Personal data". Personal data will be stored in a separate database to other study data. Also, within the interview parents will be asked to provide their email address for the purpose of sending them a voucher as a thank you for their time spent taking part in the study. Their name and email address will be stored separately to their interview transcript and will only be stored until their voucher has been sent to them.

Researchers from Queen's University Belfast / University of Birmingham will audio record the pupil focus group discussion using two digital recorders. The audio recordings will subsequently be uploaded and stored on a Queen's University Belfast / University of Birmingham secure computer server. The recordings will then be deleted from the digital recorder. The audio recordings will be used to type up transcripts of the group discussion and the typed transcripts will be stored confidentially (anonymised using ID numbers) on a Queen's University Belfast / University of Birmingham secure computer server. The audio-recordings will be processed by third parties (known as data processors), such as software and transcription companies. Contractual terms, policies and procedures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality is respected. Personal data (i.e. your child's name) will be stored in a password protected file, separate to other study data.

Electronic copies of the audio recordings will be destroyed when it has been satisfied that the transcript is an accurate written record of the interview. Only researchers working on the study as well as the software and transcription companies will have access to the electronic audio recordings and the typed transcripts. Electronic audio recordings and typed transcripts from the focus groups or interviews will never be used online, or on social media. The first name of pupils will be used during the audio recordings. When the audio recordings have been transcribed, first names will be replaced with a unique ID code. No other personal identifiers will accompany the audio recordings.

Only authorised members of the research team at Queen's University Belfast and the University of Birmingham will have access to 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](http://www.qub.ac.uk/privacynotice/Research/ListofResearchPrivacyNotices/PrivacyNoticeforResearchParticipants.html)

## **7. Who else is taking part?**

There will be 5 other schools across Northern Ireland and the Midlands taking part in the Case study. Pupils from across two classes (from years 9 and 12 in Northern Ireland and years 8 and 11 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 report. 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. Pupils, parents or staff members will not be identifiable in any of these reports, publications or presentations. 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](mailto: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 Case 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 March 2025 when the qualitative 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](mailto:canteenstudy@qub.ac.uk)

Researcher contact for all schools in Northern Ireland:

Dr Désirée McIlwee, 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: [d.milwee@qub.ac.uk](mailto:d.milwee@qub.ac.uk)

Tel: 07823 368446

Researcher contact for all schools in England:

Dr Emma Alving-Jessep, CANTEEN study Research Fellow, Institute of Applied Health Research, College of Medical and Dental Sciences, The University of Birmingham, Murray Learning Centre, Edgbaston B15 2TT.

Email: [e.aling-jessep@bham.ac.uk](mailto:e.aling-jessep@bham.ac.uk)

Tel: 0121 414 8072

CANTEEN study Chief Investigator

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Tel: 028 9097 8942

**THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING TAKING PART IN OUR STUDY.**