**Pupil Premium Report March 2016**

In the last Pupil Premium Report (November 2015), it was noted that a significant proportion of the Pupil Premium Champion’s time was spent on Social, Emotional and Behavioural interventions. It is with this in mind that I have decided take a look at the Food Groups that the Pupil Premium Champion runs each week.

**Why run a food group?**

Very simply, the food groups are run to help the participants to expand and develop their food repertoire as well as the social skills that are associated with the sharing of food.

**Is a food group really necessary?**

To answer this question it is relevant to look some of the factors that can influence a child’s food choices– all of which are relevant to the children included in food groups at St Oswalds – and some of the outcomes of a limited diet.

***Factors Influencing Food Consumption***

The factors that influence food consumption are not necessarily “stand alone” factors but can have a complex interrelationship. They include:

***Medical factors such as food neophobia and autism.***

*Dr Elizabeth Shea from the Birmingham Food Refusal Services has worked with young people with eating difficulties for the past 11 years and in her paper “Understanding and managing eating issues on the autism spectrum” she states that “Problems eating a wide range of foods are common in individuals with autism”*

***Behavioural***

***Personality factors such as extreme anxiety and disgust***

***Social factors such as parental influence and feeding styles***

*According to The Journal of Adolescent Health “More frequent family dinners are related to fewer emotional and behavioral problems, greater emotional well-being, more trusting and helpful behaviors towards others and higher life satisfaction”*

***Outcomes of a limited diet***

*According to the Pre-School Learning Alliance a varied and healthy diet:*

* *Helps to improve concentration, learning and behaviour.*
* *Promotes proper physical growth and development.*
* *Builds up strength.*
* *Promotes resistance to infection.*
* *Gives plenty of energy.*
* *Minimises future health risks like iron‑deficiency anaemia, obesity, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer and dental decay.*
* *Helps to establish healthy eating patterns and habits for life.*

If the positive outcomes listed above are “reversed”, it could be inferred that a limited diet can lead to poor concentration, irritability, stunted physical growth and development, weakness, susceptibility to infection, longer recovery times or lethargy.



**Food Groups in Practice**

*According to the British Nutrition Foundation*

*The eating habits of most 5 year olds will have been shaped largely by those of their family but, as they get older, they will begin to accumulate different experiences that may shape their food preferences and dietary patterns, either positively or negatively****. Key among these will be the habits and preferences of their friends at school and those with whom they socialise. But increasingly many other influences will begin to take hold, including habits and preferences associated with role models.***

The Food Groups at St Oswald’s provide a safe, non-judgemental and positive environment in which the children can experience new tastes, smells and other sensory sensations as well as being part of a social family-style situation where everyone sits at a table participates together.

Two food groups have been operating at St Oswald’s since September 2015. Both of the groups are run in their entirety by the Pupil Premium champion. If a child participating in the group has 1-to-1 support, an additional teaching assistant may attend the sessions. The groups are held on a Monday: the first for half an hour during Monday’s assembly and the second during the last session of the day.

Both of the groups are needs based and have evolved over time to meet the changing needs of the children as they have become used to a wider variety of food textures and tastes.

The first group is called “Food Group” and the second “Dinosaur Group”.

**Food Group**

Food Group includes a total of five children from years 1 and 2 – three of whom receive the Pupil Premium. The children are included in the group because of a number of factors: medical needs, dietary needs and/or social needs.

The children in this group work together to prepare a food item such as: cupcakes, biscuits, pancakes or rosti. If possible the children then eat what they have made. Due to social factors it is preferable that the children eat their food in school rather than take it home.

This group provides a positive social environment in which the children are encouraged to try food that is new to them. Some of their success is celebrated in the Confidence section of the school’s Super-Learner display.

**Dinosaur Group**

This group is called Dinosaur Group because when the group was first set up such was the children’s relationship with food that directly relating the group name to food would have caused anxiety for the children.

Four children from Early Years attend this group and two are eligible for Pupil Premium funding. The children are included in the group for a number of reasons: food aversion, limited diet and/or social reasons e.g learning about social interaction and sharing.

The group is run on a very structured basis: the children wash their hands, take part in food play and then have a drink and a snack.

Each week there is one play based activity that is designed to be a sensory experience to encourage the children to play with, touch and explore food items that they may not be used to. For example, when the group first started the children explored the texture of breakfast cereal, cooked pasta and dry oats. Recently the children have been involved in activities such as making “real” Mr Potato Heads, sandwiches and “painting” with food!

When the activity involves food that can be safely eaten, the children are able to try the food. If a child is averse to trying the food then they are encouraged to just lick it. *“Studies have shown that if children can witness other people 'surviving' the experience of eating a suspicious food, this makes them more willing to nibble a bit.”*

The children are being encouraged to be comfortable with foods that they are not used to and to expand their very limited food repertoire. They are also encouraged to share, work together and demonstrate good manners (e.g. using please and thank you).

After the play session the children move to another table and sit together and have a drink and a snack. They only have one snack and it is always something that all the children know that they will like.



**Are the Groups helping the children?**

The children appear to enjoy taking part in the groups and some of them have improved their limited diet and are now more open to trying new sensory food related experiences.

The politeness and manners of some of the children has also improved and the groups are a positive part of the school day for these children.

Finally, although these groups are fun for the children, they are disproportionately time consuming for the Pupil Premium Champion who plans a new activity every week, shops for resources at the weekend, sets up/ pre-prepares items for the group and tidies/washes up afterwards as well as remembering to claim back any expenditure that has been incurred!

