



LACA STATEMENT FOR EDUCATION GUARDIAN School Meals Article scheduled for Tuesday 15 December edition

Beverley Baker, Chairman, Local Authority Caterers Association (LACA) says:

"Over the past few years major changes have taken place in school food provision as a result of the Government's improvement agenda. The new regulations - Food based Standards and Nutrient based Standards (the latter of which were introduced as the final piece of the jigsaw, in Secondary schools this September) - have ensured that no 'unhealthy' food or beverages are either available or served in schools in England and all school meals are prepared using fresh ingredients.

Whilst the changes and new menus were, initially, not well received by pupils/students and have caused operational challenges for caterers, we now appear to be turning the corner and meal uptake is beginning to show signs of improvement.

With new figures out this week indicating a significant rise in levels of obesity between Reception Year and Year 6 pupils, it is absolutely vital that we increase the collective efforts of caterers, schools, parents, food suppliers and high street catering outlets to encourage children to learn about a healthy lifestyle and diet. With one of the key Change4Life campaign* messages promoting 'one regular meal' every day, a school lunch is an easy way for children and young people to have a regular, nutritious meal which can also contribute at least two of the recommended Five-A-Day fruit and vegetable portions. School meals are an integral part of the drive towards reducing obesity and LACA wants to see an all Party commitment to continuing the School Lunch Grant beyond 2011 in order for Local Authorities to continue operating an affordable school meals service for parents.

The Government's announcement in the Pre-Budget Report about extending the eligibility for free school meal children as well as the free school meal pilots to every English region, is also an important move in combating the obesity epidemic and strongly welcomed by school meal providers."

** LACA was appointed as an official Partner of the Government's Change4Life campaign in October.*