

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF FOOD ON MENTAL HEALTH & ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

IMPACT
FOOD
GROUP



NOURISHING MINDS, SUPPORTING FUTURES

Research shows that proper nutrition fuels better concentration, sharper memory, and improved mental well-being. On the flip side, poor nutrition can lead to restlessness, irritability, and difficulty focusing.

As school caterers, we recognise the vital role we play in shaping these outcomes. It's about more than just serving meals — it's about creating experiences that promote health, happiness, and learning. From providing wholesome, balanced meals to delivering educational initiatives and interactive activities, we're committed to supporting students' mental wellness.

With half of all mental health issues emerging by the age of 14 — and 75% by 24 — young people's mental well-being has never been more crucial. That's why we go beyond the plate. We empower students with the knowledge to nurture their minds, normalise open conversations around mental health, and foster a sense of belonging. Together, we're building a future where no young person feels alone in their mental health journey.



**GOOD FOOD
GOOD MOOD**

The relationship between food, mental health, and academic achievement in school-aged children is supported by a growing body of research, emphasising the critical role of nutrition in these areas.

Professor Donald Bundy, is a global expert in world health and particularly the importance of school meals in improving it in the UK and globally.

“ Investing in school meals will have a long-term positive impact on general health, reducing obesity, under pinning the NHS and global health services and leading to healthier outcomes throughout adulthood. ”

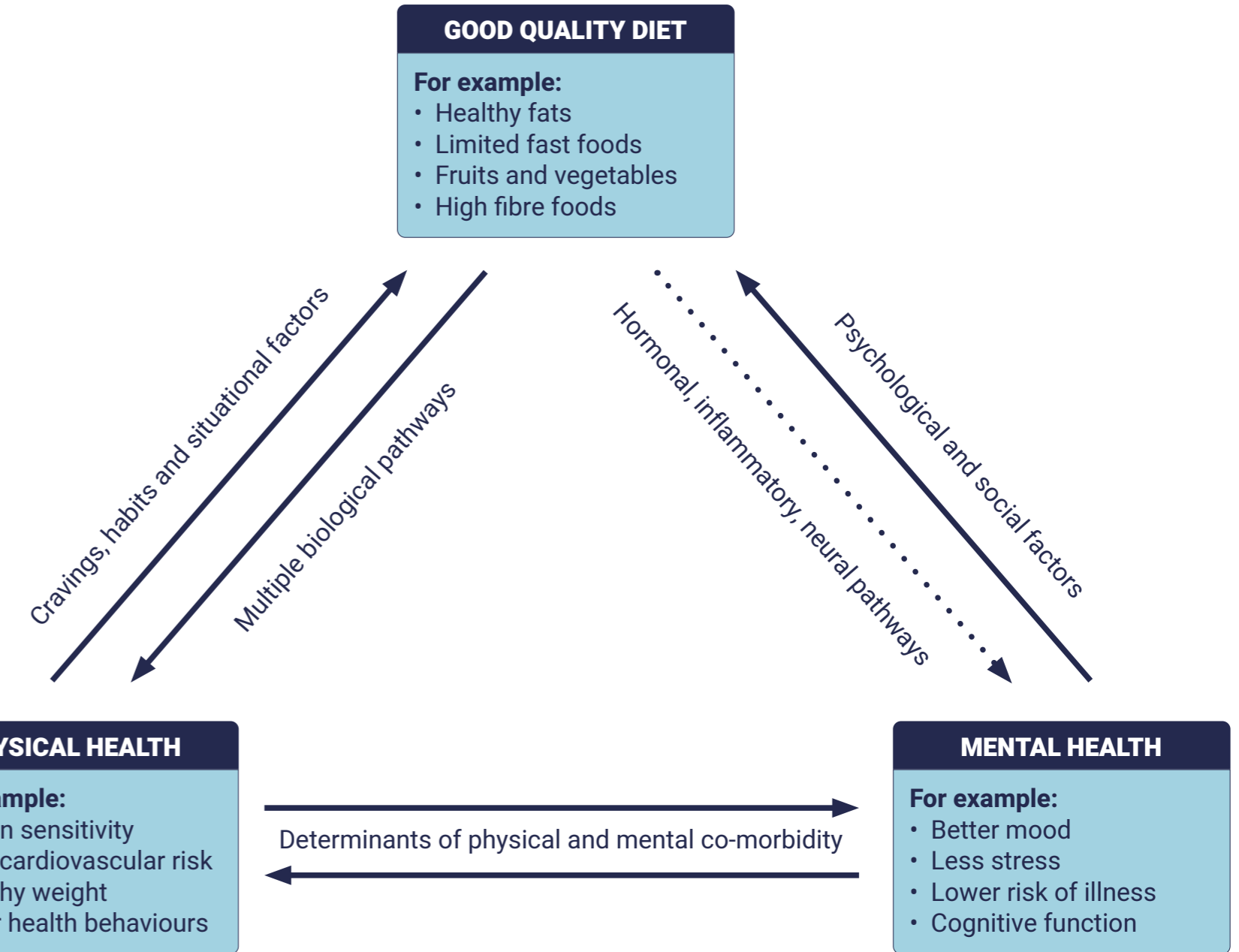
Director of the Research Consortium for School Health & Nutrition, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.



Recent findings suggest that the impact of our diets on mental well-being may be more linked to our gut health than previously thought. While further research is needed on this direct link, we do know that the brain is directly connected to the gut and having a healthy gut is key to good overall well-being. Consuming a diet that is high in a variety of plant-based foods promotes diversity in the gut microbiome to help protect gut health and immunity.

Focus on nutrition for brain health is also important when looking at the link between diet and educational outcomes. A diet high in foods that support brain function and development, such as those high in Omega 3, B Vitamins and Zinc, will allow for correct brain function such as concentration and memory. Research suggest that people who eat oily fish, a source of Omega 3, have more grey matter which is the brains' major function related to memory.

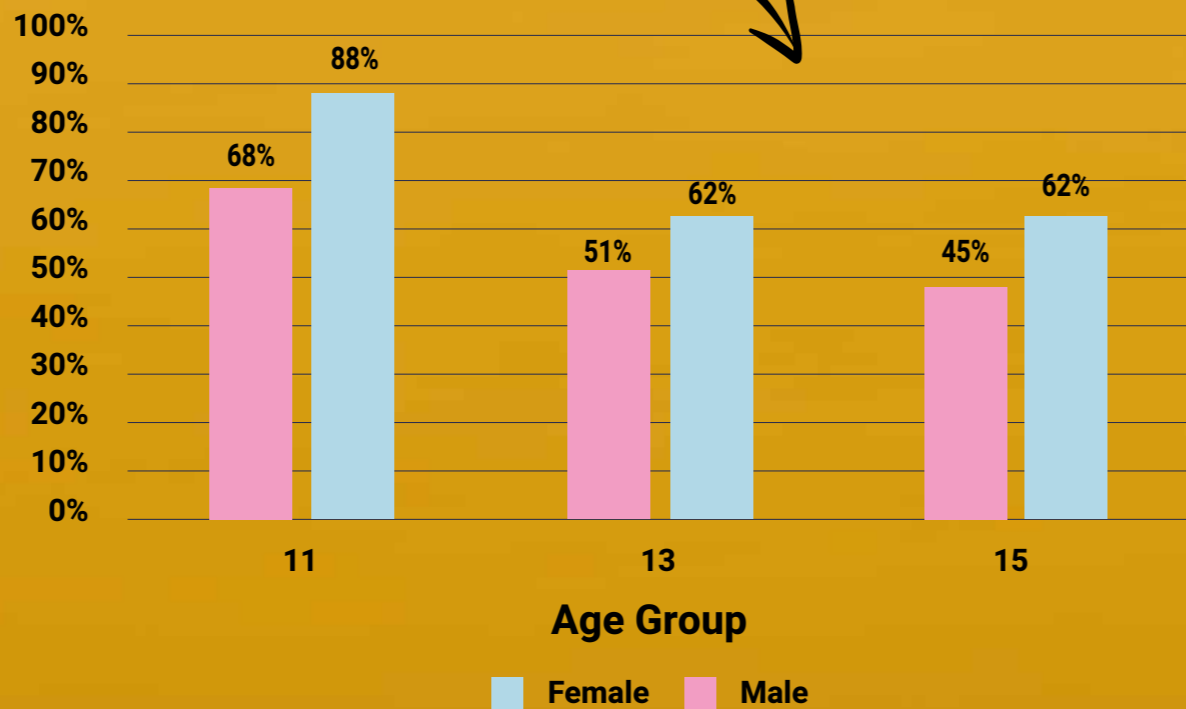
**GOOD FOOD
GOOD MOOD**



BREAKFAST - THE GENDER GAP

The rate of breakfast consumption declines as students progress into adolescence, with many citing a lack of time in the morning or a lack of appetite as key reasons. This decline is even more pronounced among adolescent girls, who are more likely to skip breakfast than boys, often due to concerns about weight gain.

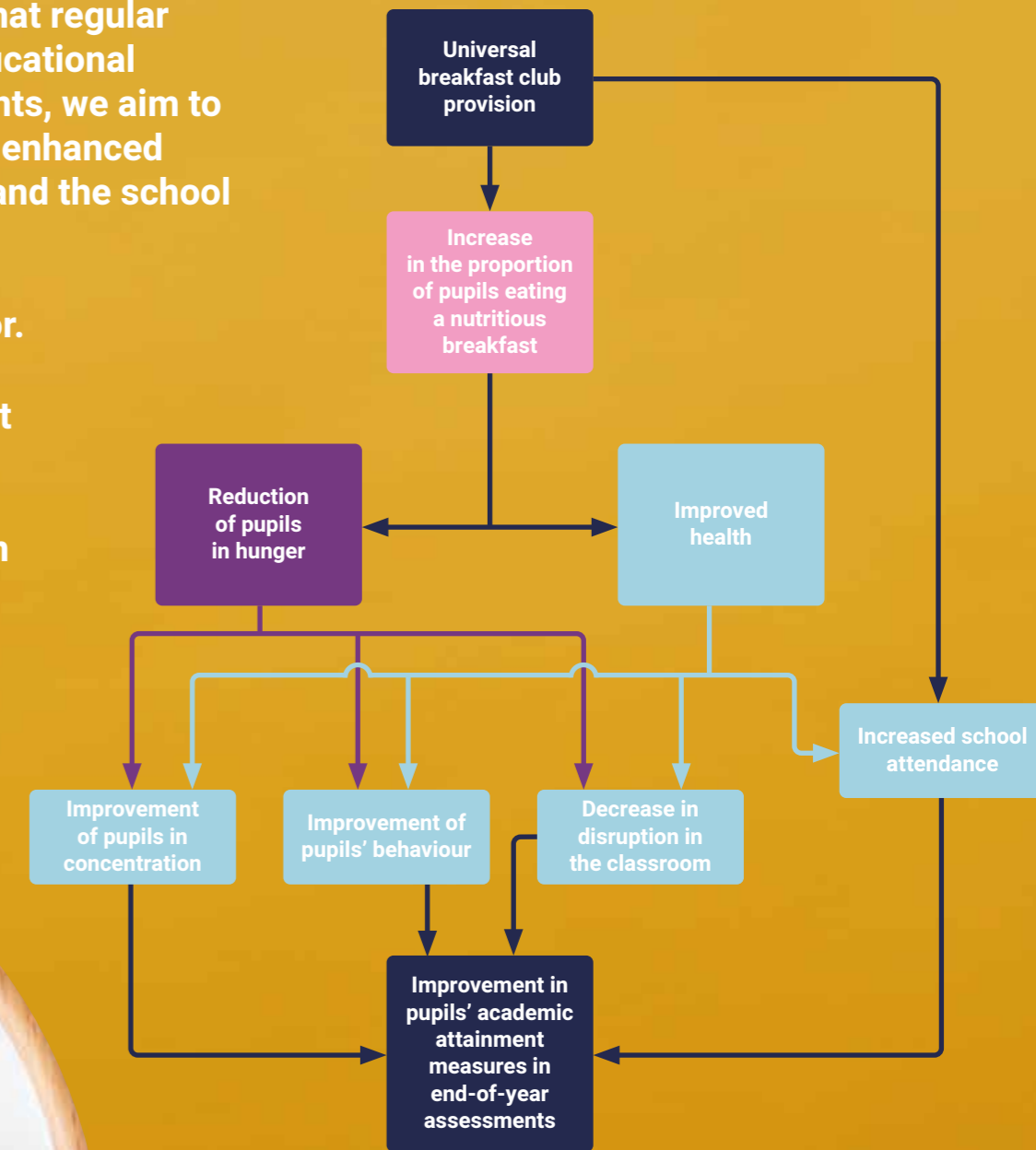
BREAKFAST CONSUMPTION RATE



The diagram illustrates the far-reaching impact that regular breakfast consumption can have on students' educational outcomes. By providing free porridge to all students, we aim to support both improved nutritional well-being and enhanced educational performance for individual students and the school community as a whole.

Socioeconomic status is another significant factor.

A 2020 article in the Times Education Supplement (TES) references a World Health Organization (WHO) study, which found a 29-percentage-point gap in daily breakfast consumption among girls in England when comparing those from the most affluent backgrounds to those from the least affluent.



MOOD BOOSTING MENUS

By offering delicious, nutritious meals served by warm and friendly staff, we aim to create positive dining experiences for young people. Our skilled chefs, in collaboration with a qualified nutritionist, design menus that strike the perfect balance between health and flavour, ensuring options that are both popular and nourishing.

In addition to providing nutrient-rich meals that support mental and physical well-being, we strive to create a dining environment where students feel safe, supported, and at ease. Our approach focuses on reducing common anxieties by addressing key areas such as:

- **The Dining Environment** – friendly and helpful staff
- **Allergens and Intolerances** – clear labelling and the introduction of our allergen buddy programme.
- **Menus and Offers** – clear and accessible marketing



ALLERGEN BUDDIES

By prioritising both nutrition and emotional well-being, our Mood-Boosting Menus contribute to a healthier, happier school experience for all students.

START YOUR DAY WITH A FREE BOWL OF PORRIDGE
Also available to staff with the purchase of any hot drink, or 70p without a drink

ADDITIONAL TOPPINGS
Mixed Berries 25p
Honey 25p



DID YOU KNOW?
Porridge is a very good source of fiber, especially beta Glucan, and is high in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Whole oats are the only food source of Avenanthramides, a unique group of antioxidants believed to protect your heart.

HELP YOURSELF SALAD BARS

Our self-serve salad bars make it easy for students to boost their meals with nutrient-dense extras like seeds, proteins, and fresh vegetables. This interactive approach encourages students to experiment with new foods and customise their plates. We make our salad bars as colourful and appealing as possible, using creative displays and marketing materials to attract attention and inspire healthy choices.



FREE PORRIDGE

Since 2020, Impact Food Group has provided students with access to a free bowl of porridge every morning before school, giving them a nutritious start to the day. Through engaging marketing materials, we emphasise the importance of breakfast and highlight key ingredients known for their slow-release energy and cognitive benefits, supporting student focus and learning.

PLANT POWER & SEASONAL EATING

Our nutritionist ensures that all meat-free dishes contain sufficient protein and key nutrients vital for children's learning and development. We also prioritise seasonal ingredients, working closely with our suppliers to design menus that feature fresh, locally grown produce; an approach which enhances both taste and nutritional value.



MOOD BOOSTING MENUS



SERVING WHOLE INGREDIENTS

By focusing on whole foods, seasonal ingredients, and accessible nutrition, we empower students to build healthier habits that support their overall well-being and learning potential. Many traditional cooking methods result in waste, with the most nutritious parts of fruits and vegetables often discarded. Increasingly, we are taking a whole-ingredient approach, creating dishes which use every part of an ingredient. For instance, our Cauliflower Pasta Bake incorporates the leaves, stalks, and florets, reducing food waste while enhancing the meal's nutritional value and flavour.



BETTER DESSERT ALTERNATIVES

To promote healthier eating habits, we offer fresh fruit and yogurt as alternatives to traditional hot and cold desserts. Our ongoing efforts to reduce added sugar in desserts prioritise natural sweetness from fruit. Meal deal posters and digital displays showcase fruit-based options, subtly encouraging students to make more nutritious choices.



We incorporate vegetables into desserts – try our beetroot brownies!

Our pizzas and pasta sauces are fortified with vegetables.

All our white wraps have been replaced with multi-grain wraps – along with new beetroot and pumpkin wraps.

BUILDING A POSITIVE FOOD CULTURE

Before children can benefit from healthy school meals, our first challenge is encouraging them to step into the dining hall. By combining marketing initiatives with engaging events, we aim to break down the stigmas around school food and demonstrate to students, parents, and school staff that school meals can be delicious, nutritious, and affordable.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

We use a mix of print and digital marketing to highlight the health and wellness benefits of school food. Every time we launch a new menu, we emphasise its key nutritional benefits through creative, informative materials for students and parents. These materials include posters, leaflets, and social media content, which schools can share on their websites, newsletters, and digital channels. Our goal is to demonstrate how far school food has evolved, inspiring greater uptake and forming positive associations with school dining experiences.



NUTRITION WORKSHOPS & ASSEMBLIES

Posters and marketing materials are impactful, but nothing beats face-to-face engagement. Our nutritionist and chefs visit schools to deliver hands-on workshops and assemblies that highlight the importance of healthy eating and the enjoyment of food – from cooking to eating. We offer a range of activities aligned with the curriculum or tailored to the needs of specific year groups. By linking these sessions with lunchtime service, students are encouraged to apply their new knowledge during their next visit to the canteen.



TASTING ZONES

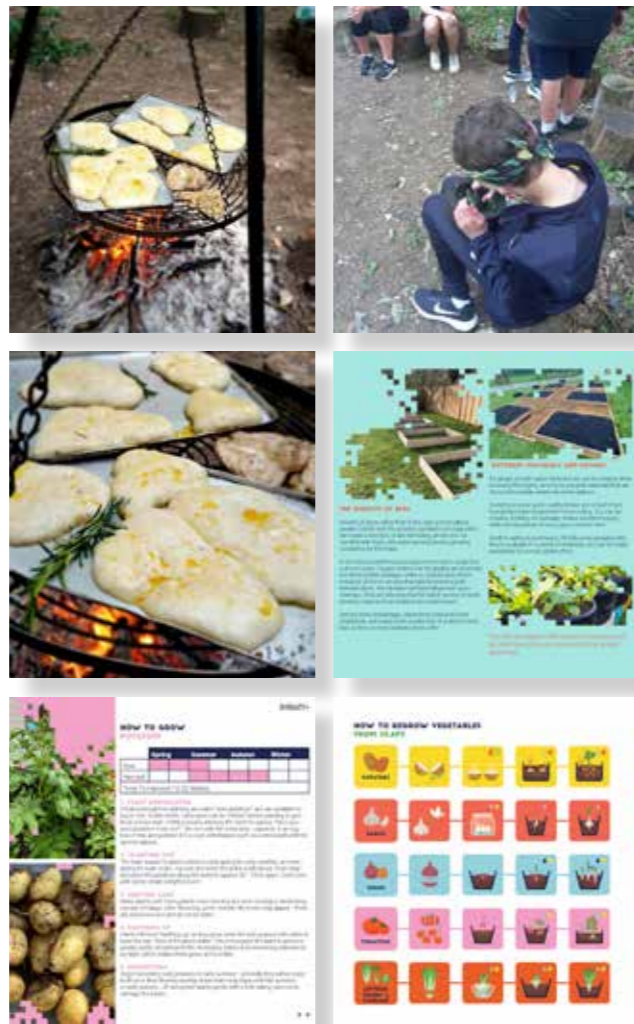
To create buzz around food, we use our Tasting Zone pop-ups. These interactive experiences highlight key menu items or introduce new dishes. Our chefs engage students with fun activities like sushi rolling, encouraging them to explore new tastes and ingredients. This hands-on approach builds excitement, boosts awareness, and increases student engagement with our menus.



POSITIVE FOOD CULTURE

CONNECTING FOOD & NATURE

Understanding where food comes from helps break down barriers around food preferences and encourages students to try new things. Our gardening workshops teach students about the seed-to-plate journey, fostering an appreciation for fresh produce and cooking. Through our Social Impact Fund, we support schools in setting up gardening initiatives and offer hands-on activities like outdoor cooking workshops.



SUPPORTING EXAM SUCCESS

Exam season can be a stressful time for both students and teachers, so we do our part to support them. Our menus highlight brain-boosting foods that aid cognitive function, and we provide practical tips on how nutrition can improve performance. Our nutritionist has also developed an Exam Nutrition Guide to support students as they prepare for and sit their exams.

WELLNESS CAMPAIGNS

Educational wellness campaigns, such as Eat the Season and Vegetable of the Month, spotlight seasonal produce and encourage students to explore different ingredients. These short bursts of food education are designed to build interest and reinforce positive messages about nutrition.

We also support awareness days, such as World Mental Health Day, using food as a way to promote mental, physical, and emotional well-being. These events create opportunities for engaging, fun experiences linked to food education.

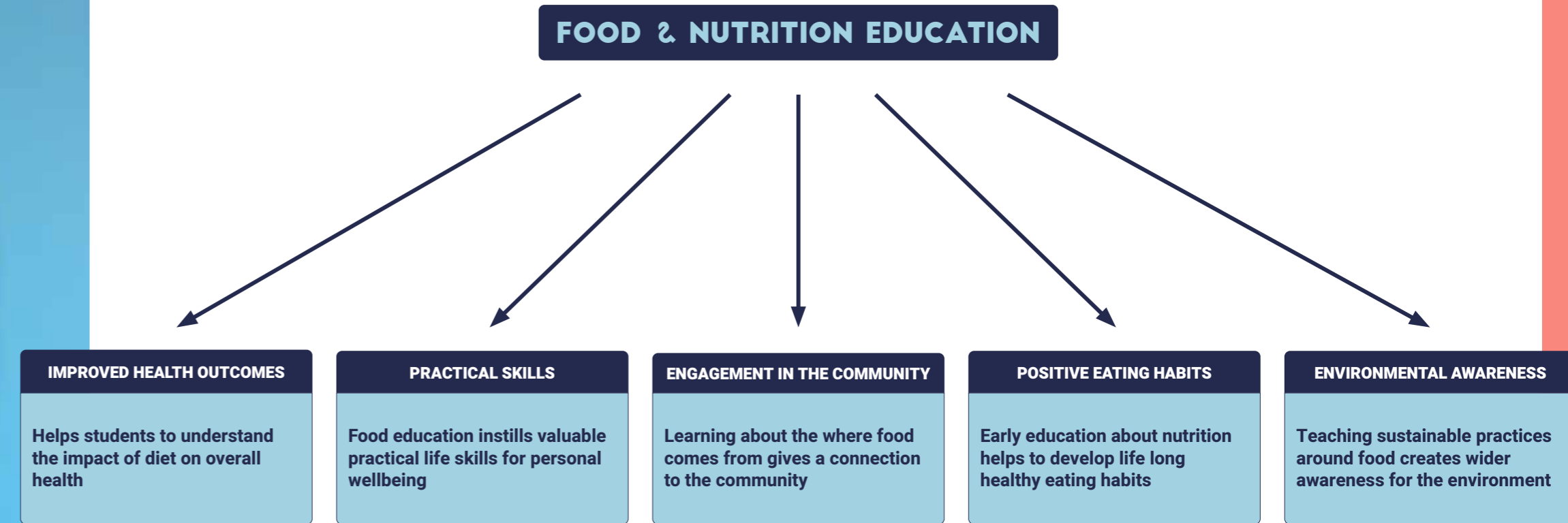


BEYOND THE SCHOOL GATES

Our food education efforts don't stop at the school gate. We provide recipe guides for students and their families, encouraging them to continue cooking and eating healthily at home. One of our key resources is the University Cooking Guide, designed to equip sixth-formers with the skills and confidence to cook nutritious meals when they leave home for university or independent living.

By fostering a positive food culture, we aim to create a lasting impact on students' relationship with food, supporting their well-being both in school and beyond.

TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH THE POWER OF FOOD



At Impact Food Group, we understand that a healthy, balanced diet rich in fresh, varied ingredients plays a vital role in supporting student well-being, steady moods, and improved concentration – all of which are essential for success in the classroom and beyond. That’s why everything we do is guided by evidence-based nutrition and holistic well-being initiatives.

Our mission is to ensure every student has access to balanced, nourishing meals that empower them to thrive physically, emotionally, and academically. By prioritising nutrition and well-being, we aim to support students in reaching their full potential.

This document provides an overview of some of the approaches we’re taking. We continue to seek new ways to support young people and welcome suggestions and partnership opportunities to expand our impact and help transform lives through the power of food.

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