Beyond Compliance

Reforming school food, health education and physical activity in England

A national policy case for stronger standards, public transparency and continuous improvement - with Lancashire as a 2026 case study.

Core proposition

England should move from minimum school-food compliance to measurable responsibility for the health environment schools create. Government should set stronger statutory standards first; schools should then receive a transition period, followed by transparent monitoring, corrective support and public Healthy School Scores.

Prepared by Sitora

August 2026

Policy proposal and case-study analysis. Not a clinical study. Menu analysis measures what is offered, not what individual children select or consume.

Contents

Executive summary

England is facing a persistent childhood-weight challenge. In 2024/25, 10.5% of Reception children and 22.2% of Year 6 children in England were living with obesity; 23.5% and 36.2% respectively were overweight or living with obesity. In Lancashire-12, excess weight affected 25.7% of Reception children and 36.6% of Year 6 children. [1][2]

Schools do not cause childhood obesity on their own. Family income, neighbourhood food environments, genetics, sleep, marketing, physical activity, deprivation and wider social conditions all matter. But schools are one of the few environments in which government can influence food, health education and movement repeatedly, at scale, across childhood.

The current English School Food Standards are food-based and contain useful protections, including daily fruit and vegetables, wholegrain provision and limits on certain foods. However, the Department for Education has itself proposed a major overhaul in 2026: more vegetables, fruit, fibre, wholegrains and pulses; tighter restrictions on sweetened baked products and desserts; no deep frying; tighter limits on processed meat and batter-coated foods; and a narrower list of permitted drinks. [3][4]

The central finding

Our Lancashire case study shows why reform is needed. Lancashire Catering can operate within the present English framework while its published Spring/Summer 2026 primary rotation still presents a sweet headline dessert on 12 of 15 school days (80%), with mixed fruit as the headline dessert on only 3 days. Fruit, yoghurt and other alternatives are also available, so this is not evidence that every child eats a sweet dessert. It is evidence about what the menu repeatedly normalises.

Internationally, several systems go further. France regulates menu frequencies across 20 successive meals; Finland defines a balanced meal and integrates school meals into the curriculum; Japan uses food education and diet/nutrition teachers; and Brazil now directs at least 85% of federal school-food purchasing resources to in natura or minimally processed foods while capping processed and ultra-processed foods at 10%. [5][6][7][8]

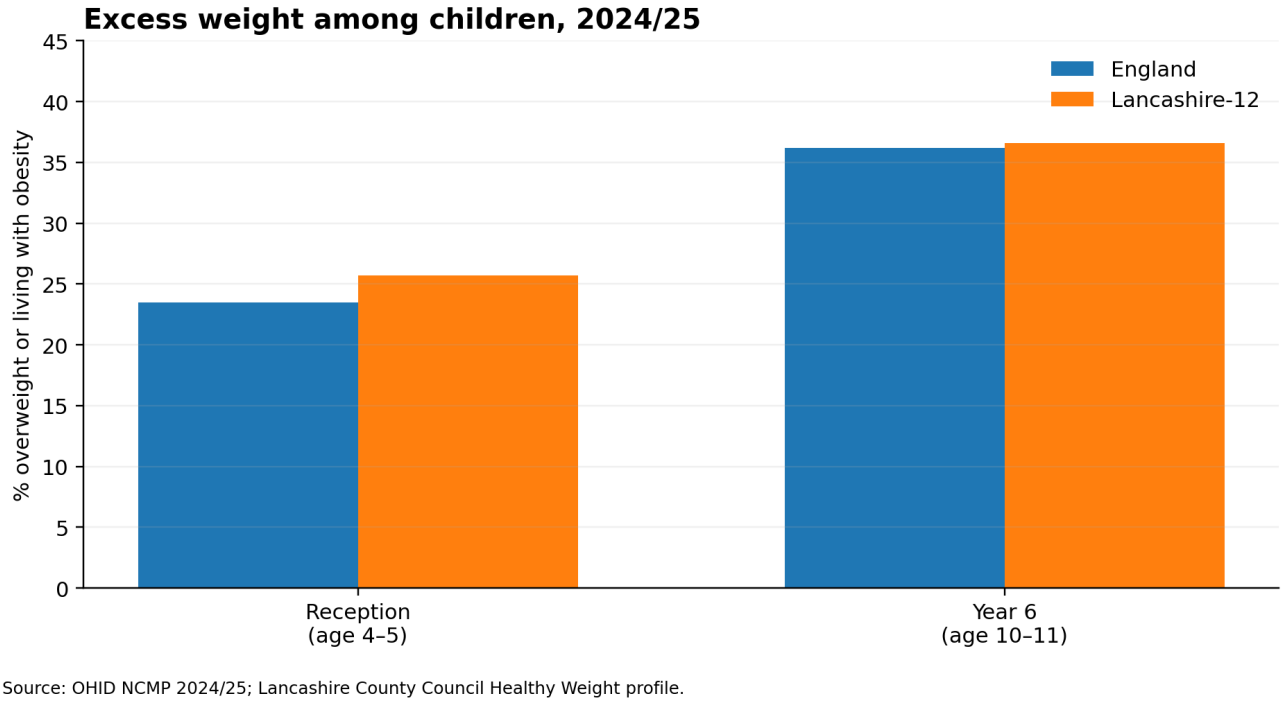
This report proposes a stronger national model: government reform first; a 12–18 month transition period; annual digital menu and health-environment monitoring; a public Healthy School Score; corrective support for schools that fall short; and escalation only where persistent failure remains after support.

#	Recommendation	Purpose
1	Legislate stronger standards	Make the 2026 direction statutory and measurable, with clear frequency and procurement rules.
2	Score the whole school health environment	Food 45 points; health/food education 20; physical activity 25; improvement/governance 10.
3	Publish scores for parents	Inform families without publishing individual or school-level pupil BMI.
4	Create a transition period	Give schools, trusts, councils and caterers 12–18 months to redesign menus, retrain and renegotiate supply.
5	Monitor annually	Require structured menu, ingredient, nutrition, PE/activity and health-education evidence.
6	Correct before punishing	Automated improvement plans, support and re-audit before escalation.
7	Build national infrastructure	Use a digital platform such as Sitora School Health Intelligence to audit, benchmark, redesign and monitor.

1. The scale of the problem

1.1 Childhood excess weight is already common by the end of primary school

The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) measures children in Reception and Year 6 in state schools. The 2024/25 data show a striking age gradient: obesity prevalence rises from 10.5% in Reception to 22.2% in Year 6, while excess weight rises from 23.5% to 36.2%. [1]



Source: OHID NCMP 2024/25; Lancashire County Council Healthy Weight profile.

Figure 1. Excess weight prevalence in England and Lancashire-12, 2024/25.

Lancashire mirrors the national Year 6 problem and is worse than England at Reception for excess weight. Lancashire County Council reports 3,005 Reception children and 4,835 Year 6 children with excess weight in 2024/25. [2]

Why school policy matters

The school day reaches children repeatedly over many years. A national system can shape what is served, what is taught, how much children move, and what parents are told. That makes school policy one of the most scalable levers available to government - even though it is only one part of the wider obesity picture.

1.2 Obesity is not a reason to stigmatise children

A reform programme should never turn body weight into a school league table. BMI is a population surveillance tool, not a fair measure of an individual school's quality. Schools serving more deprived communities could otherwise be penalised for social conditions they do not control.

The proposed Healthy School Score therefore measures the environment created by the school: food, health education, physical activity, governance and improvement. Pupil BMI should remain confidential and aggregated for public-health surveillance, not used as a public school-performance score.

1.3 The health environment is broader than lunch

From September 2026, England's statutory health-education guidance expects primary pupils to be taught about daily exercise, good nutrition and sufficient sleep. Government guidance also recommends an average of at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity a day and aims for at least two hours of high-quality PE and sport each week in primary schools. [9][10]

This creates a clear policy opportunity: food, health education and physical activity should no longer be managed as separate initiatives. They should be treated as one measurable whole-school health system.

2. Why the current English framework is no longer enough

2.1 Current rules contain good principles - but permit weak patterns

The current practical guide says children should receive a wide range of foods, plenty of fruit and vegetables, unrefined starchy foods, protein and dairy, with only a small amount of foods high in fat, sugar and salt. It requires starchy foods daily, at least three different starchy foods each week, at least one wholegrain variety each week, and limits starchy foods cooked in fat or oil to no more than two days a week. [3]

These are meaningful protections. The weakness is that a menu can satisfy individual food-group requirements while still repeatedly foregrounding sweet desserts, pastry, breaded products and processed-meat-style choices. Compliance does not necessarily guarantee that the healthiest pattern is the default or the cultural norm.

> **Policy test**
> The right question is not only “Does this school meet the rules?” It is also “What dietary pattern is this school normalising five days a week?”

2.2 Government has already acknowledged the need for reform

The Department for Education’s April 2026 consultation proposes substantial changes. These include vegetables or salad with all main-meal options every day; fruit with all desserts; a fruit-only dessert day at least once per week in primary schools; at least 50% wholewheat/brown rice and pasta; pulses across all menu options at least one day per week; tighter dessert frequency; removal of fruit juice and combination drinks; no deep frying; and stronger restrictions on processed meat and batter-coated foods. [4]

Area	Current direction	2026 proposed direction
Vegetables	Current: daily provision	Proposed: vegetables/salad with every main meal option, including grab-and-go
Desserts	Sweet desserts can appear within current food-based rules	Proposed: fruit with every dessert; fruit-only day weekly; sweetened products much less frequent
Wholegrains	At least one wholegrain starchy variety weekly	Proposed: at least 50% wholewheat/brown rice and pasta
Pulses	Encouraged	Proposed: pulses within/alongside all menu options one day per week
Frying	Frequency limits apply	Proposed: no deep frying
Drinks	Several permitted categories	Proposed: substantially narrower list, especially in primary
Processed/high-FSS foods	Food-group limits	Proposed: tighter frequency and composition controls

The government response to the consultation is expected in September 2026. Until final regulations are published, proposed rules should be treated as policy direction rather than current law. [4]

3. International systems that go further

No country offers a perfect template. The useful approach is to identify design features that England can adapt: France's cycle-based frequency rules, Finland's daily balanced-meal model, Japan's integration of food and education, and Brazil's procurement controls.

3.1 France: regulate the pattern across the menu cycle

French school-meal rules assess variety over 20 successive meals. They require at least 10 meals with raw vegetables or fresh fruit as a starter or accompaniment, at least 8 meals with raw fruit as dessert, 10 meals with cooked vegetables as the accompaniment, and at least 4 qualifying fish main dishes. They also limit fatty fried/pre-fried dishes and certain sugary desserts. [5]

> **What England can borrow**
> A 15- or 20-meal audit cycle is easier to police than broad aspirations. It reveals repeated patterns that a single-day compliance check can miss.

3.2 Finland: define what a good meal is, every day

Finland guarantees pupils a balanced, appropriately organised and supervised school meal. A good meal is described positively: a warm main course, a side of vegetables, bread and spread, milk or buttermilk, and water. School meals are part of the national core curriculum, student welfare and food education. [6]

This is a philosophical difference. Instead of only restricting "bad" items, Finland specifies the structure of a good meal and makes the eating experience part of education.

3.3 Japan: treat lunch as food education

Japan's Shokuiku framework integrates food education into schools, supported by diet and nutrition teachers. Official Japanese material describes school lunch as a "living textbook" that integrates food into educational activities. [7]

The lesson for England is that children should not be taught one message in health education while the canteen repeatedly communicates another. Curriculum and catering should reinforce each other.

3.4 Brazil: regulate what public money buys

Brazil's PNAE provides perhaps the clearest procurement contrast. In 2026, at least 85% of federal school-food purchasing resources must be used for in natura or minimally processed foods; processed and ultra-processed foods may account for no more than 10%, with up to 5% for processed culinary ingredients. The programme also bars federal PNAE funds from being used for specified ultra-processed products and requires menu planning by nutritionists. [8]

England currently does not have a directly comparable national 85% minimally processed procurement rule for school meals. A procurement standard would move regulation upstream: instead of only policing menus after purchase, government would shape what can be purchased with public money.

System	Core mechanism	Relevance for England

England (current)	Food-group frequency rules	Useful baseline, but limited control of the overall repeated pattern
France	20-meal frequency rules	Makes fruit, vegetables, fish and restricted foods measurable across a cycle
Finland	Balanced daily meal + curriculum	Defines the healthy default positively
Japan	Food education + specialist nutrition role	Aligns the canteen with health education
Brazil	Procurement percentages + nutritionist planning	Controls processed-food exposure upstream

4. Lancashire case study: compliant does not necessarily mean optimal

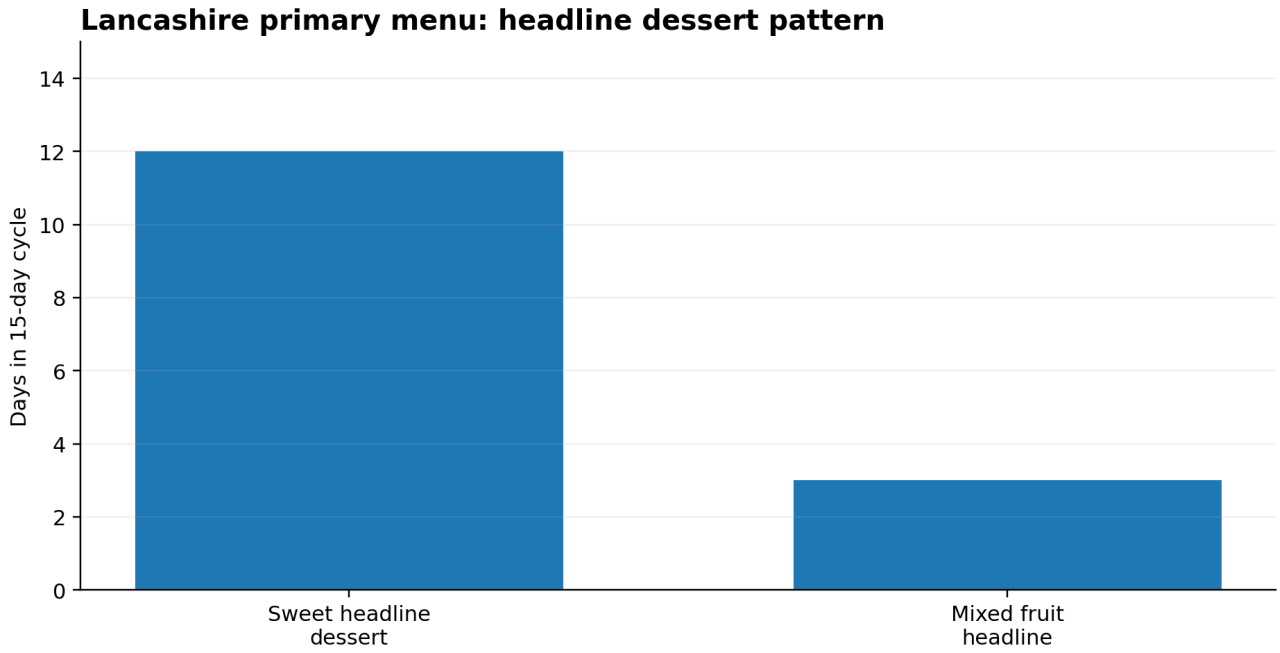
4.1 Why Lancashire is a fair case study

Lancashire is useful precisely because it is not being presented here as a negligent caterer. Lancashire Catering has promoted nutrition analysis, local sourcing and Food for Life accreditation. Its menu provides fruit, yoghurt and other alternatives, and its published dishes frequently include vegetables or salad. The case study therefore tests the sufficiency of the national framework rather than simply looking for an obvious bad actor.

The analysis uses the Lancashire Catering Spring/Summer 2026 primary F+ three-week rotation and the associated Saffron nutrition portal. It examines availability and menu prominence. It does not show what individual pupils choose, consume or waste.

4.2 The headline-dessert pattern

Across the 15-day published cycle, a sweet headline dessert appears on 12 days (80%); mixed fruit is the headline dessert on three days (20%). The sweet items include flapjack, shortbread, ice cream with dessert sauce, cookie, traybake, bun, biscuit, Cocoa Krispie cake, jam slice, mousse and cupcake. Fruit, yoghurt and/or jelly alternatives are also listed. [11]



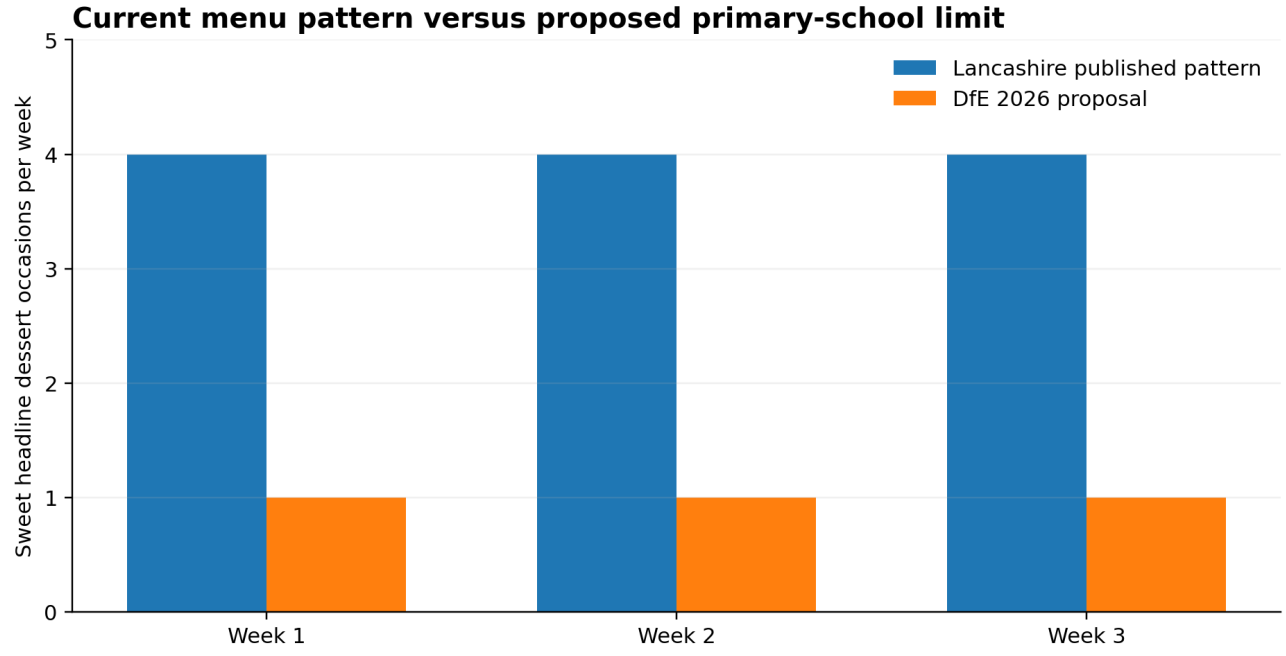
Source: Lancashire Catering Spring/Summer 2026 F+ three-week menu; Sitora coding. Alternatives such as fruit/yoghurt are also offered.

Figure 2. Headline dessert pattern in Lancashire Catering's Spring/Summer 2026 primary rotation.

This matters because menu architecture shapes norms. Making fruit available beside a cookie is not equivalent to making fruit the normal dessert and the cookie an occasional item.

4.3 The proposed English standard would change this pattern sharply

The 2026 DfE proposal would move primary schools toward fruit on most days and much tighter sweet-dessert frequency. In our coding, Lancashire's published headline pattern is four sweet dessert days in each week of its three-week cycle.



Proposed standard is subject to final government response; consultation response expected September 2026.

Figure 3. Lancashire published headline pattern compared with the proposed primary-school frequency direction.

4.4 Nutrition examples show why combinations matter

Lancashire's portal provides portion-level nutrition. An illustrative Monday combination using simultaneously available items - Southern Style Chicken Goujon Wrap, paprika potatoes, mixed vegetables and Fruity Flapjack - totals approximately 709 kcal, 32.4 g fat, 10.0 g saturated fat, 21.9 g total sugars and 1.3 g salt based on the portal values collected in this study. [11]

This is not a claim that every child chooses or finishes that meal. It demonstrates why whole-meal analysis is more informative than looking at one component in isolation. "Sugars" in the portal is total sugar, not necessarily free or added sugar.

Published item	kcal	Fat g	Sat fat g	Total sugars g
Fruity Flapjack	310.7	18.9	8.4	15.1
Beef Chilli Nachos Bake	315.9	19.2	8.8	3.8
Vanilla Ice Cream & Dessert Sauce	168.2	8.0	5.0	19.3
Chocolate Cookie	184.9	8.8	4.3	12.1
Mixed Fruit Medley	26.2	0.2	0.1	6.1

The mixed picture is important: the same system can provide low-energy fruit and nutritionally stronger meals alongside energy-dense sweet options. The policy problem is therefore about defaults, frequency, balance and repeated exposure - not declaring every school meal unhealthy.

4.5 The local obesity context makes the question urgent

Lancashire's own public-health profile reports that 36.6% of Year 6 children were overweight or living with obesity in 2024/25, while 22.2% were living with obesity. These rates are similar to England at Year 6, but they remain high in absolute terms. [2]

Lancashire demonstrates the national issue

A local authority can take catering quality seriously, broadly follow England's current framework, and still operate in a population where more than one in three Year 6 children have excess weight. That does not prove school meals caused obesity. It does show why "compliance achieved" cannot be the end of national policy.

5. From food rules to a whole-school health standard

Food is only one part of the school-controlled health environment. A serious national response should align three daily influences: what children are fed, what they are taught about health, and how much opportunity they have to move.

5.1 Food environment

- Make vegetables, fruit, wholegrains, pulses and quality protein the normal default.
- Restrict the frequency and prominence of sweet desserts, processed meat, deep-fried and heavily formulated foods.
- Apply procurement standards so public money increasingly buys minimally processed ingredients.
- Cover breakfast, lunch, vending, tuck shops, grab-and-go and school events rather than regulating lunch alone.
- Require allergen-safe and culturally appropriate alternatives without weakening nutritional quality.

5.2 Health and food education

- Measure whether statutory health education is delivered in practice, not merely whether a policy document exists.
- Teach age-appropriate food literacy: balanced plates, fibre, free sugars, hydration, food labels, cooking and how marketing influences choices.
- Use the dining room as part of learning, following the principle that the food environment should reinforce classroom teaching.
- Engage parents with clear, practical information rather than moralising or weight stigma.

5.3 Physical activity

- Measure timetabled PE, active breaks, extracurricular opportunities and inclusive participation.
- Encourage active travel and movement throughout the school day.
- Use the UK Chief Medical Officers' average 60-minute daily activity recommendation as the public-health reference, while recognising schools do not control the whole day. [10]
- Reward participation and inclusion rather than only competitive-sport performance.

6. The Healthy School Score

Parents should be able to see how effectively a school creates a healthy environment. The score should be national, standardised, auditable and focused on factors the school controls.

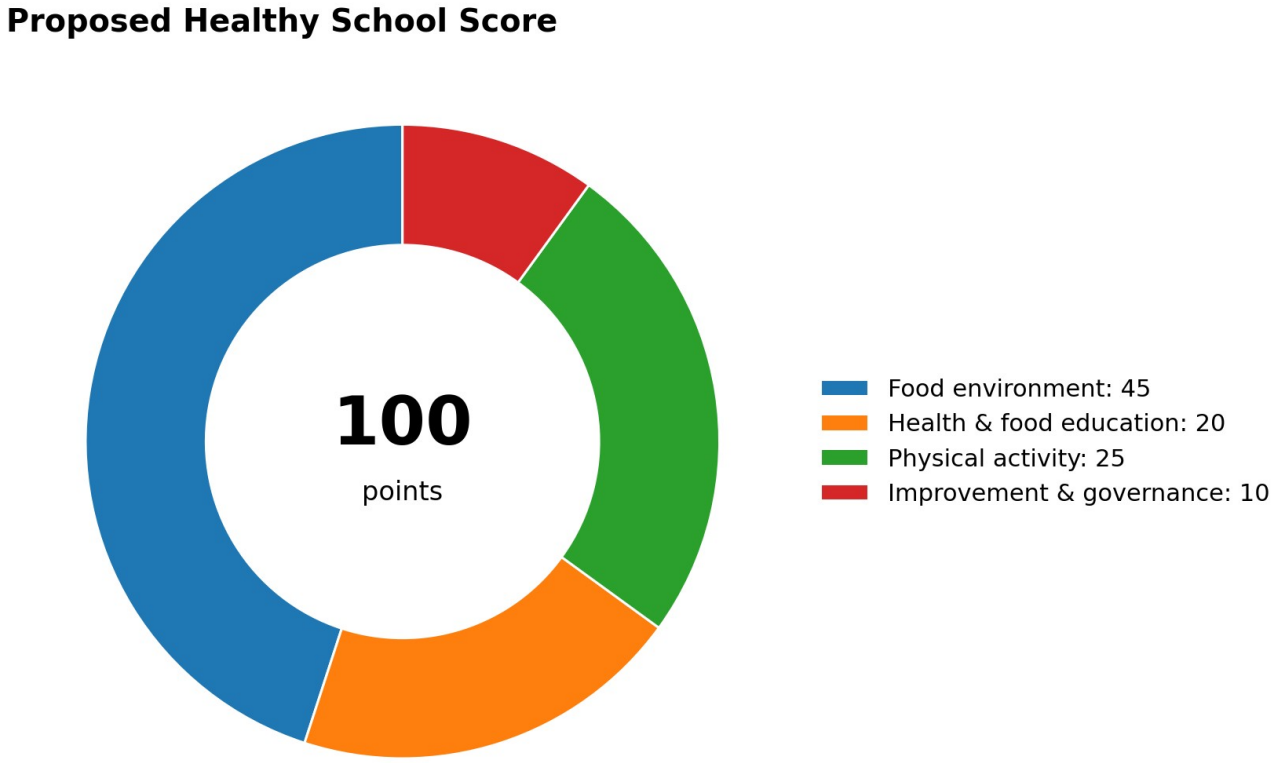


Figure 4. Proposed weighting for a 100-point Healthy School Score.

Pillar	Points	Illustrative indicators
Food environment	45	Menu compliance; vegetable/fruit default; wholegrain/pulses; sweet-food frequency; processing/procurement; drinks; breakfast; ingredient transparency
Health & food education	20	Statutory curriculum delivery; food literacy; cooking/practical learning; parent communication; consistency between teaching and canteen
Physical activity	25	PE provision; daily movement opportunities; extracurricular activity; inclusive participation; active travel
Improvement & governance	10	Annual submission; evidence quality; response to previous findings; improvement plan; governing-body oversight

6.1 What parents would see

Illustrative parent-facing result
HEALTHY SCHOOL SCORE: 76/100 - Good
Food: 32/45 | Health education: 17/20 | Physical activity: 20/25 | Governance: 7/10
Strengths: daily vegetables, strong PE participation, clear nutrition teaching.
Improve: sweet dessert frequency; low wholegrain use.
Improvement plan: active. Next review: Spring 2027.

The score should be accompanied by context, evidence dates and an improvement status. A school with a lower score but a credible, on-track improvement plan should be distinguished from a school that repeatedly fails to act.

6.2 What must never be included in the public score

- Individual pupil weight or BMI.
- Named pupils' health data.
- A simplistic "obesity rate = school quality" metric.
- Any scoring method that structurally penalises schools because of pupil deprivation, ethnicity, disability or local health burden.
- Unverified menu claims or social-media photographs used as formal evidence without audit.

7. Government reform and implementation pathway

The order matters. Government should change the rules first. Schools cannot be expected to meet a national standard that has not yet been defined. Once the standard is clear, implementation should be firm but fair.

Recommended national reform pathway

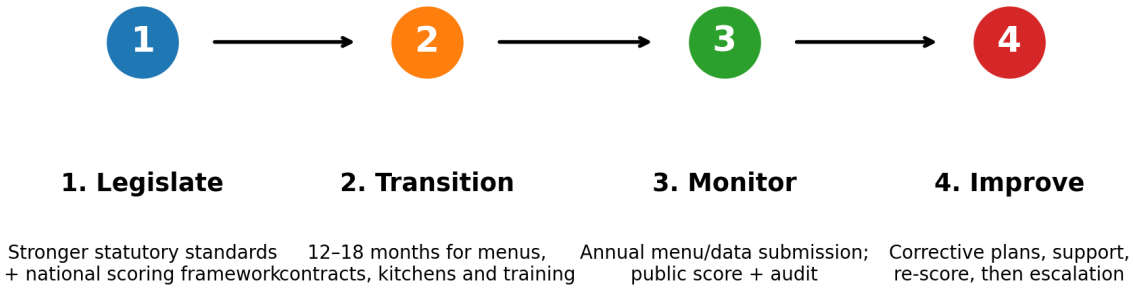


Figure 5. Recommended reform sequence: legislate, transition, monitor, improve.

7.1 Stage 1 - legislate

DfE and DHSC should publish a new statutory School Health and Food framework, with measurable requirements and a public scoring methodology. The final framework should build on the 2026 consultation but go beyond food to integrate health education and physical activity.

7.2 Stage 2 - transition for 12–18 months

- Publish model menus and procurement specifications.
- Provide a digital pre-audit tool so schools can see gaps before enforcement.
- Fund kitchen/equipment changes where standards require different preparation methods.
- Help local authorities and multi-academy trusts renegotiate catering and supplier contracts.
- Train catering teams and school leaders.
- Engage pupils and parents in menu redesign and taste testing.

7.3 Stage 3 - mandatory monitoring

After transition, schools or their caterers should submit structured evidence annually. The system should automatically check standards, calculate the Healthy School Score and identify areas requiring correction.

7.4 Stage 4 - corrective improvement, then escalation

The first response to a weak score should be correction, not punishment. A school might be told that it meets 27 of 32 food requirements but exceeds dessert frequency, lacks wholegrain provision and has insufficient activity evidence. The platform should generate a practical improvement plan and a re-review date.

Where a school persistently fails after support and adequate time, the matter can escalate through the trust, local authority, DfE or relevant inspection/accountability route. This makes the system credible without turning early implementation into a punitive exercise.

8. Sitora School Health Intelligence

Sitora's opportunity is not to replace government policy. It is to become the measurement, implementation and continuous-improvement infrastructure beneath a stronger national framework.

8.1 Audit

Schools upload or connect their rotating menus, recipe data, supplier specifications, breakfast/vending offers, health-education evidence and activity provision. Sitora converts these into structured data and checks them against statutory rules.

8.2 Benchmark

The platform compares the school with current English standards, new statutory standards once enacted, national percentiles and selected international best-practice indicators. International comparisons should remain contextual rather than falsely treating foreign rules as English law.

8.3 Redesign

Where a menu falls short, Sitora proposes realistic replacements within constraints such as budget, allergies, religious/cultural requirements, kitchen capacity and existing suppliers. Examples could include reducing sweet desserts from four days to one, increasing wholegrain content through 50:50 blends, replacing a processed-meat occasion with pulses or fresh protein, or redesigning grab-and-go choices so vegetables are built in.

8.4 Monitor

Dashboards track improvement over time at school, trust, local-authority, regional and national level. Government can see where standards are being implemented successfully and where targeted support is needed.

8.5 Parent transparency

A parent-facing layer publishes the Healthy School Score, component scores, evidence date, strengths, improvement areas and current improvement status. It should be simple enough to understand in seconds, with deeper evidence available for those who want it.

User	What Sitora provides
School	Upload data; receive audit, score and corrective plan
Caterer	Test menus before publication; optimise recipes and procurement
Trust / council	Compare schools; target support; manage supplier standards
Government	Monitor national implementation and inequalities; update policy using live evidence
Parents	See a clear, current picture of the school-controlled health environment

9. Data, governance and safeguards

9.1 Minimum data model

Domain	Core fields
Food	Menu item, portion, recipe, ingredients, nutrition, processing category, supplier, cost, dietary/allergen flags
Menu context	Day, meal service, main/alternative/grab-and-go, dessert, drink, breakfast/vending availability
Education	Curriculum coverage, lesson evidence, practical cooking/food literacy, parent communication
Activity	PE minutes, active breaks, clubs, participation, inclusive provision, active-travel initiatives
Governance	Review date, responsible lead, governing-body oversight, improvement actions, re-audit status

9.2 Evidence hierarchy

- Level A: structured system data, recipe specifications, contracts and verified timetables.
- Level B: published menus, curriculum plans and policy documents.
- Level C: school self-declaration with supporting evidence.
- Level D: unverified narrative or anecdotal evidence - useful for leads, not scoring.

9.3 Ingredient and ultra-processed-food classification

Menu names alone are not enough to classify food robustly under NOVA or another processing framework. “Pizza”, “burger” or “flapjack” may be prepared in very different ways. Any processing score should therefore use recipe and supplier ingredient data, record confidence, and distinguish confirmed classifications from items awaiting evidence.

9.4 Privacy and fairness

- No identifiable pupil health data should be required for routine scoring.
- Aggregate NCMP data may be used for policy context, not as a school quality score.
- Schools should be able to challenge factual errors before public scores change.
- Methodology and weightings should be public.
- Scores should show evidence age and confidence.
- Independent governance should oversee changes to the scoring model.

10. Recommended national policy package

1. Replace the current framework with stronger statutory standards - Use the 2026 reform direction as the minimum starting point; make healthy defaults measurable across the whole school day.

2. Introduce cycle-based menu audits - Assess patterns across 15–20 meals, borrowing the logic of France rather than relying on isolated day checks.

3. Introduce procurement-quality rules - Phase in a minimum share of public school-food spending on whole/minimally processed ingredients, informed by Brazil's model but adapted to UK supply chains.

4. Make fruit and vegetables the default - Require vegetables with every main option and make fruit the normal dessert on most primary-school days.

5. Tighten sweet-food frequency - Move sweetened desserts and baked products from routine to occasional.

6. Strengthen wholegrain and pulse provision - Make high-fibre starches and pulses normal components, not occasional examples.

7. Align food and curriculum - Require the dining environment to reinforce statutory health education; develop practical food literacy.

8. Strengthen movement across the school day - Measure PE plus wider opportunities to move, including active breaks, clubs and active travel.

9. Create the Healthy School Score - Publish a 0–100 score based only on school-controlled inputs and processes.

10. Require annual evidence submission - Menus, recipes, ingredient/procurement data, education and activity evidence should feed a common national system.

11. Use corrective regulation - Give support and a defined correction window before sanctions or escalation.

12. Publish national and local dashboards - Track implementation, identify inequality and show whether policy changes are improving the school environment.

11. Proposed pilot programme

A national reform system should be tested before full rollout. Lancashire is a strong pilot area because it has a central catering service, public nutrition information, a meaningful childhood-weight burden and a menu dataset already suitable for structured analysis.

11.1 Phase A - Lancashire evidence pilot

- Complete recipe-level data capture for all 15 primary-school days.
- Obtain ingredient lists and supplier specifications for bought-in components.
- Classify menu items against current English rules and final 2026 rules once published.
- Apply a French-style cycle audit as a comparative research exercise.
- Build the first Healthy School Score prototype for food, education and activity.
- Include a sample of secondary schools to test canteen/grab-and-go complexity.

11.2 Phase B - 50-school multi-region pilot

Test primary and secondary schools across different regions, deprivation levels, catering models and governance types. Use the pilot to calibrate scoring, identify unintended incentives and measure administrative burden.

11.3 Phase C - government demonstrator

With DfE/DHSC or local-authority partners, run a prospective improvement cycle: baseline score, corrective plan, menu redesign, implementation, re-score and parent communication. The core evaluation question is whether the system changes the school-controlled environment - not whether short-term BMI changes can be attributed to it.

Success criteria
High data completeness • auditable scores • low administrative burden • practical menu corrections • school acceptance • parent comprehension • measurable improvement in food/education/activity indicators • no evidence of pupil stigma or perverse incentives.

12. Conclusions

England's school-food system contains important standards, but the policy direction in 2026 already reflects an official recognition that the framework needs updating. The childhood-weight data add urgency: by Year 6, more than one in three children in England have excess weight, and more than one in five are living with obesity. [1]

The Lancashire case study illustrates the central policy weakness. A serious, accredited catering system can broadly follow the current rules while a sweet headline dessert is still presented on 80% of days in a published primary rotation. The appropriate conclusion is not that Lancashire is uniquely failing; it is that national standards should do more to define and normalise a healthier pattern.

International models demonstrate practical alternatives. France shows how to regulate frequency across a menu cycle. Finland shows how to define a balanced meal positively. Japan shows how food can become part of education. Brazil shows how public procurement can limit processed-food exposure upstream. England can combine these ideas without copying any one system wholesale.

The reform should be firm: stronger statutory rules, transparent national measurement and public accountability. But it should also be implementable: government reform first, then a transition period, then monitoring and correction, with escalation for persistent failure.

Final recommendation

Create a national Healthy School Standard and public Healthy School Score that measures food, health education, physical activity and continuous improvement. Give every school the tools to improve - and give every parent a clear view of the health environment their child experiences at school.

References and methodology

References are intentionally weighted toward official government and statutory sources. Accessed 12 August 2026 unless otherwise stated.

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[11] Lancashire Catering Service. F+ Spring/Summer 2026 primary menu and Lancashire primary Saffron nutrition portal. Dataset compiled in Sitora Lancashire School Food Pilot 2026. https://lancsprimary.mysaffronportal.com/

[12] Department for Education. Portion sizes and food groups - School Food Standards resources. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-food-standards-resources-for-schools/portion-sizes-and-food-groups

Methodology notes

- Lancashire menu analysis covers the published Spring/Summer 2026 F+ primary three-week cycle (15 school days).
- "Headline dessert" means the dessert prominently listed for that day in the published rotation. Alternatives such as fruit, yoghurt or jelly are acknowledged separately.
- The 12/15 statistic measures menu prominence and availability, not actual pupil selection or consumption.
- Nutrition values were transcribed from Lancashire's live Saffron portal where available and should be re-validated before formal publication to government.

- UPF/NOVA classifications are not made from dish names alone. Ingredient lists and supplier specifications are required for robust classification.
- International rules are used as comparative design references, not as legal tests of English schools.
- The proposed Healthy School Score is a policy design in this report, not an existing government rating.

Annex A - Draft Healthy School Score rubric

Pillar	Indicator	Pts	Evidence
Food	Vegetables/salad with all mains	6	Daily menu evidence
Food	Fruit as normal dessert/default	5	Cycle frequency
Food	Wholegrain/high-fibre starch	4	Recipe/menu evidence
Food	Pulses/quality protein	4	Cycle frequency
Food	Sweet dessert frequency	5	Cycle frequency
Food	Processed meat/fried/breaded limits	5	Menu + recipe evidence
Food	Processing/procurement quality	6	Ingredient + spend data
Food	Drinks/breakfast/vending environment	5	Whole-school offer
Food	Nutrition/portion quality	5	Recipe/portion analysis
Education	Statutory health education delivered	8	Curriculum + samples
Education	Practical food literacy/cooking	5	Curriculum evidence
Education	Parent/pupil engagement	3	Communications/ participation
Education	Canteen-teaching consistency	4	Audit

Annex A - Draft Healthy School Score rubric (continued)

Pillar	Indicator	Pts	Evidence
Activity	PE provision	8	Timetable
Activity	Daily movement opportunities	6	School-day audit
Activity	Extracurricular/inclusive participation	6	Registers/provision
Activity	Active travel	5	Policy/evidence
Governance	Annual data submission	3	System record
Governance	Improvement plan delivery	4	Action tracking
Governance	Leadership/governor oversight	3	Minutes/review

Scoring weights require validation through stakeholder consultation and pilot testing. They are included to demonstrate how a transparent national score could work, not as a final formula.

Annex B - Lancashire headline dessert rotation

Day	Headline dessert	Coding
W1 Mon	Fruity Flapjack	Sweet
W1 Tue	Vanilla Shortbread / biscuit	Sweet
W1 Wed	Ice Cream & Dessert Sauce	Sweet
W1 Thu	Mixed Fruit Medley	Fruit
W1 Fri	Cookie / milkshake offer	Sweet
W2 Mon	Marble Traybake & Toffee Drizzle	Sweet
W2 Tue	Mixed Fruit Medley	Fruit
W2 Wed	Raspberry Bun	Sweet
W2 Thu	Lemon Biscuit / cookie	Sweet
W2 Fri	Cocoa Krispie Cake	Sweet
W3 Mon	Jam Sandwich Slice	Sweet
W3 Tue	Marble Shortbread	Sweet
W3 Wed	Chocolate Mousse / cook's choice mousse	Sweet
W3 Thu	Mixed Fruit Medley	Fruit
W3 Fri	Sticky Toffee Cupcake	Sweet

Coding is intentionally simple for the headline-frequency analysis. It should not be confused with a nutrient-threshold definition of "sugary dessert" under French law or any final English regulation.