



**FOOD**  
for  
*THOUGHT*



Children and Young People's Healthy Eating  
in the London Borough of Bromley



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## Introduction

### What is Healthwatch Bromley?

Healthwatch Bromley is one of 152 local Healthwatch organisations that were established throughout England in 2013, under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. The dual role of local Healthwatch is to champion the rights of users of health and social care services and to hold the system to account for how well it engages with the public.

The remit of Healthwatch Bromley as an independent health and social care watchdog is to be the voice of local people and ensure that health and social care services are safe, effective and designed to meet the needs of patients, social care users and carers.

Healthwatch Bromley gives children, young people and adults in Bromley a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are purchased, provided and reviewed within the borough.

Healthwatch Bromley's core functions are:

1. Gathering the views and experiences of service users, carers, and the wider community,
2. Making people's views known,
3. Involving locals in the commissioning process for health and social care services, and process for their continual scrutiny,
4. Referring providers of concern to Healthwatch England, or the CQC, to investigate,
5. Providing information about which services are available to access and signposting,
6. Collecting views and experiences and communicating them to Healthwatch England,
7. Working with the Health and Wellbeing board in Bromley on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Joint Health and Wellbeing strategy (which will influence the commissioning process).

## Strategic Drivers

Healthwatch Bromley's role is to support the voices and views of the local community and to ensure their opinions are taken into account when services are commissioned.

Healthwatch Bromley (HWB) engaged the local community and spoke to people of all ages and backgrounds to ask them what they believed should be the priorities for children and young people for HWB to investigate in the upcoming year. It was evident from feedback received that young people's understanding of healthy eating was a major contender for HWB to create a piece of work around.

Although childhood obesity is not a problem in Bromley, HWB were interested in primary school children's knowledge around healthy eating and what they believed may stop their peers from leading a healthy lifestyle. Furthermore, almost 30 thousand people in Bromley are at a high risk of developing diabetes Type 2 so educating children around healthy eating will be key for future prevention.

Bromley has a population of 309,392 people, with children and young people under the age of 20 years making up 24.2% of the population.

Some wards in Bromley such as Cray Valley West, Cray Valley East, Penge and Cator and Crystal Palace have high areas of deprivation. In turn, various schools in these areas unlike those in more affluent wards, have poor attainment in English, writing and maths. For example, St John's Church of England Primary School situated in Penge has only 24% of children meeting the expected standard and their latest Ofsted inspection rated them as "Requires Improvement". St Mary Cray Primary School (Cray Valley East) has 36% of children meeting the expected standard with St Paul's Cray Church of England Primary School (Cray Valley East) scoring 38% with an Ofsted inspection of "Requires Improvement".

The above evidence goes towards proving that there is a link between poverty and educational attainment. Furthermore, on the RAG rating scale, Bromley scores "amber" in School Readiness: The percentage of children with free school meal status achieving a good level of development at the end of reception.

HWB set out to speak to Year Five and Year Six children from Highfield Junior School, a primary school based in Shortlands. We were interested in learning what knowledge the children had around healthy eating and to also raise awareness. To do this we used Public Health guidance to focus on:

- The Eatwell plate
- Sugar levels
- Salt levels
- Intake of water

- The importance of exercise
- The 5 a day message

This report presents the findings that emerged through our engagement. The recommendations that are provided, were led by the young people themselves and are included to support decision making and commissioning of services for them.

This report will be shared with the Bromley Health and Wellbeing Board, the school that participated, the Bromley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), the Care Quality Commission (CQC), Public Health Bromley, NHS England and Healthwatch England, The London Borough of Bromley's Children and Young People Senior Commissioning Manager and the Voluntary and Community Sector.



## Methodology

This report documents the findings of the research, which took place in October 2017. Highfield Junior School were invited to take part in the workshop which was called Food for Thought. This report aims to identify what knowledge the children have around healthy eating.

The workshop that was split into six sections which consisted of the following:

- 1) **Food is fuel:** This section looked at the importance of food being fuel for our bodies and what happens if we over and under eat.
- 2) **The Food Plate:** The children got into groups and using plastic food, were asked to separate the food into the different sections of the food plate. These were then explored.
- 3) **Sugar:** The children were shown visual materials such as the measurement of how much free sugar that they should have a day and how much is in a bottle of Coca-Cola.
- 4) **Water:** This section looked at the importance of drinking water, how to tell if you're not getting enough and the recommended daily allowance.
- 5) **Salt:** The children were shown what their daily recommended salt allowance looks like and what the long term effects of too much salt can be.
- 6) **Exercise:** This part of the workshop looked into the importance and benefits of exercise.



Food for Thought workshops

119 responses were gathered during the course of the workshops.

As previously mentioned, the workshops were split into six sections. We tried to make these as interactive and interesting as possible. A PowerPoint presentation was used throughout. We used plastic food and copies of the food plate which were given out for the children to interact with. We also used visual tools, such as empty fizzy drink bottles which showed how much sugar was in each drink.

The first section looked at the Food is Fuel concept. The children were asked questions such as “What happens when an aeroplane doesn’t have enough fuel?” and “What happens when an aeroplane is overloaded?” It was explained that this is the same concept as the human body. We need enough food (fuel) to function but too much can make us put on weight and have negative consequences.

Next the children were put into groups and given plastic food and a copy of the food plate. They were asked to place the plastic food on the section of the food plate where they thought it should go (Fruit and vegetables, Starchy carbohydrates, Proteins, Dairy and alternatives and Oil and spreads.) Once the task had been completed, we discussed where the food actually belonged. There was often surprise amongst the children when they discovered that a lot of the food that they were given didn’t actually belong on the food plate at all, for example; chocolate, cakes, French fries, sweets etc. It was explained that while it was okay to have these types of food occasionally, they have no nutritional value. A number of children were especially surprised that chocolate didn’t belong in the dairy section. We also informed them that they should only drink a small cup of fruit juice a day as when fruits are juiced the sugar becomes free sugar and can lead to teeth decay and weight gain. The 5-a-day message was also relayed, with it being clarified to the children that fruit and vegetables can be fresh, frozen, tinned or dried - they all count towards their 5-a-day.

Section three focused on the consumption of sugar. The children were shown what 24g of free sugar looks like and told that it was their recommended daily allowance. In comparison, they were also shown empty bottles of fizzy drinks which had been filled with how much free sugar they contain. There was often astonishment at how much sugar fizzy drinks contain, particularly a 500ml bottle of Coca-Cola (54g). Different names of sugar were also discussed and also how labels can be misleading.

The children were then asked how many cups of water they thought that they should be drinking per day. Suggestions ranged from two to twenty. The participants were told that six to eight cups was the recommended daily allowance. The benefits of drinking water was then discussed and how to tell if you’re not drinking enough.

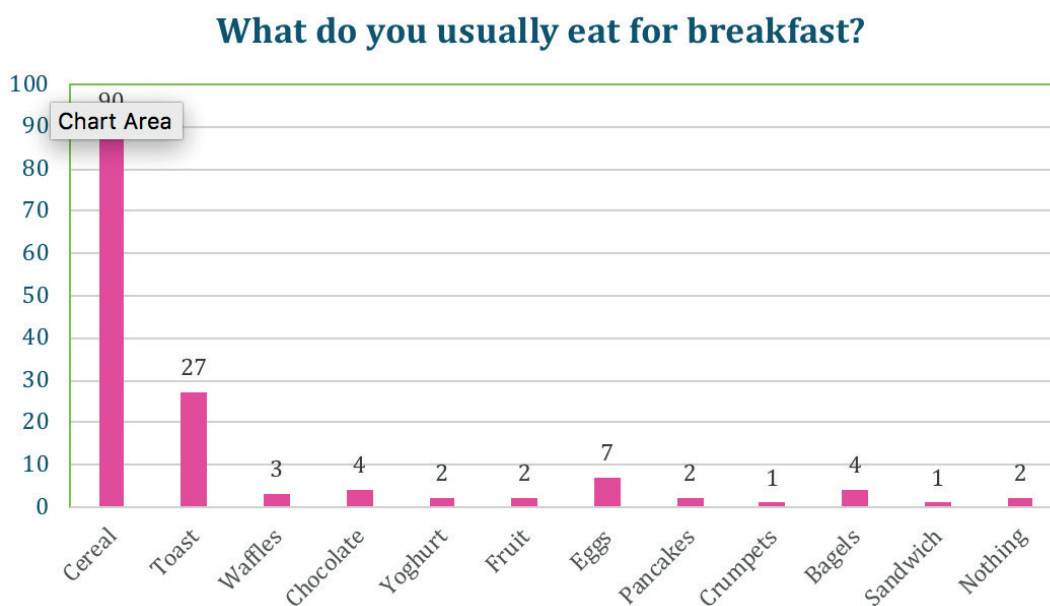


Dangers of salt was the next topic that was discussed. The children were shown what 5g of salt looks like (their recommended daily allowance.) The dangers of too much salt and hidden salt were also discussed.

Exercise was the final subject covered in the workshop. The students were asked to guess how many minutes of exercise they should be doing per day. Guesses averaged at 30 minutes. The children were often shocked when they were told that they should be doing 60 minutes of exercise per day. We then discussed the importance of exercise which can help with our physical and mental health.

During the Food for Thought workshops, the participants were then asked to fill out a questionnaire in order to gage their thoughts around healthy eating and exercise.

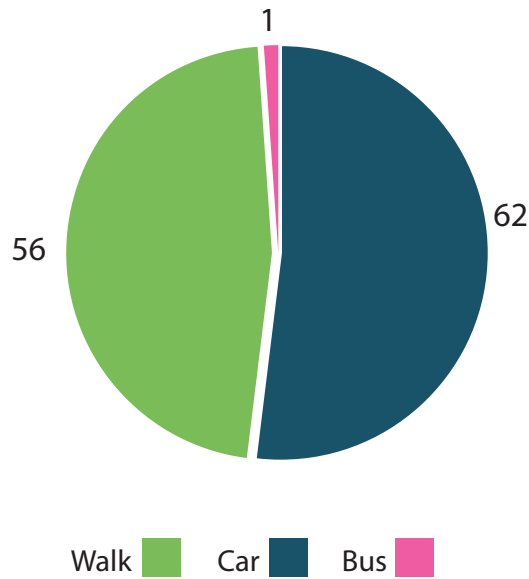
## Findings



As we can see from the above chart, cereal was the most popular choice in terms of breakfast. Lots of children indicated that they ate porridge, but there were some that eat more sugary cereals. Although there were only two children who claim they do not eat breakfast, the importance of eating this meal was stressed and the children were reminded that they needed their “fuel” not just for physical activity, but for their concentration too. Some children chose more than one option for breakfast.

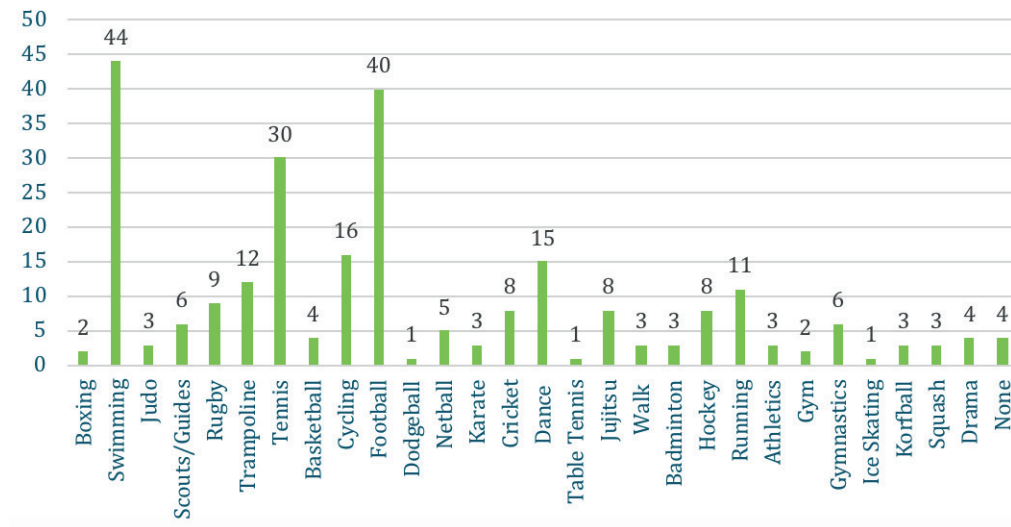


## How do you get to school?



The chart shows that 52% of the children surveyed get a lift to school, whilst 47% walk and 1% take the bus. Lots of the children who received a lift to school said that they often parked further away from the school so they were able to have a short walk too.

## What activities do you do outside of school?



Swimming (44) and football (40) proved to be the most common activities undertaken by the children surveyed. Tennis (30), cycling (16), and dance (15) were also popular. Only four children claimed that they do not do any after school activities.

For the questionnaire, the children were told how to measure portion sizes, then asked how many portions of fruit and vegetables they believe they eat in one day. 49% of those surveyed said that they eat 5 or more a day. Only 4% said they have one portion and no children said they didn't eat any fruit or vegetables.

On the subject of water, 57% of those surveyed said they drink the daily recommended allowance or more. No children said they didn't drink any water, but 5% said they drink one cup a day and 3% said they had two.

When surveyed about how often the participants eat take-away and fast food; the results

were as follows: Never 13%, Rarely 19%, Monthly 19%, Fortnightly 17%, Weekly 26%, More Often 5%. Additionally only 3 children out of the 119 children claimed that they do not have regular visits to the dentist.

At the end of the session, the students were asked what they had learned during the workshop. Popular answers included:

- How to stay healthy
- To cut down on sugar and salt
- To do 60 minutes of exercise a day
- That ketchup can contain a lot of sugar
- To drink more water
- About the different types of sugars
- Which oils are good
- That bread contains sugar
- To check food labels
- About the different food groups
- That chocolate doesn't belong in the dairy section

The participants were also asked what may stop their peers from eating healthily and exercising.

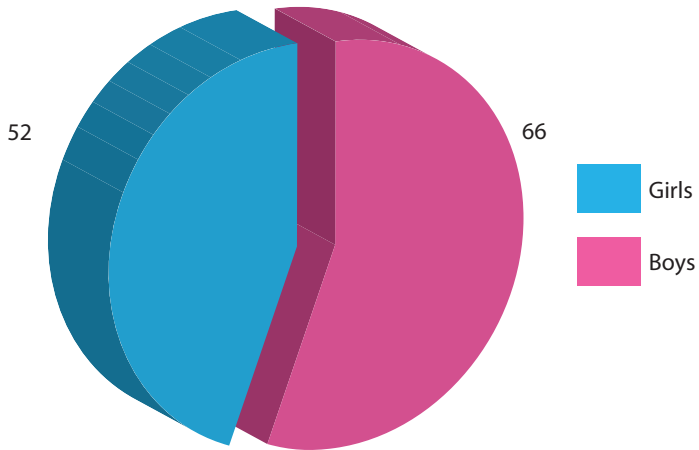


Some of the reasons that the children came up with included being addicted to junk food, enticing packaging, that healthy food can be expensive, being too busy studying to exercise, being too lazy, spending too much time on gaming/the internet and going to parties. Some children also pointed out that those with physical disabilities may find it harder to exercise.

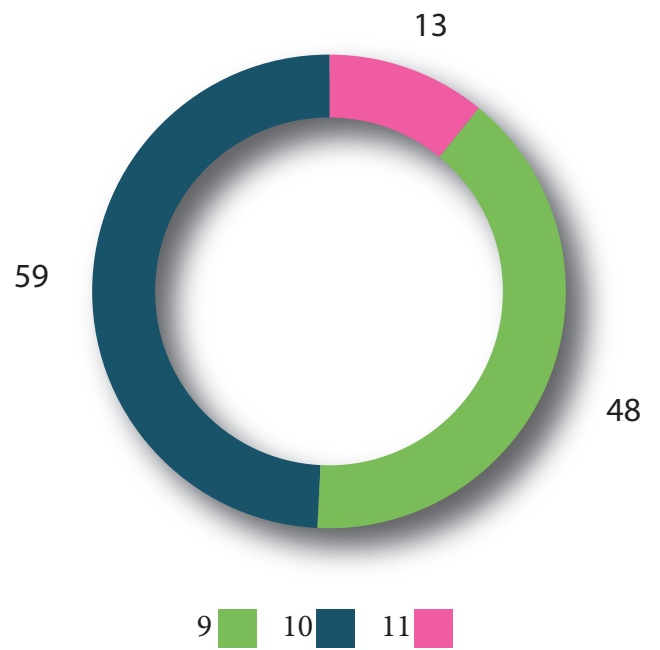
## Demographics

The demographics of the children surveyed were as follows:

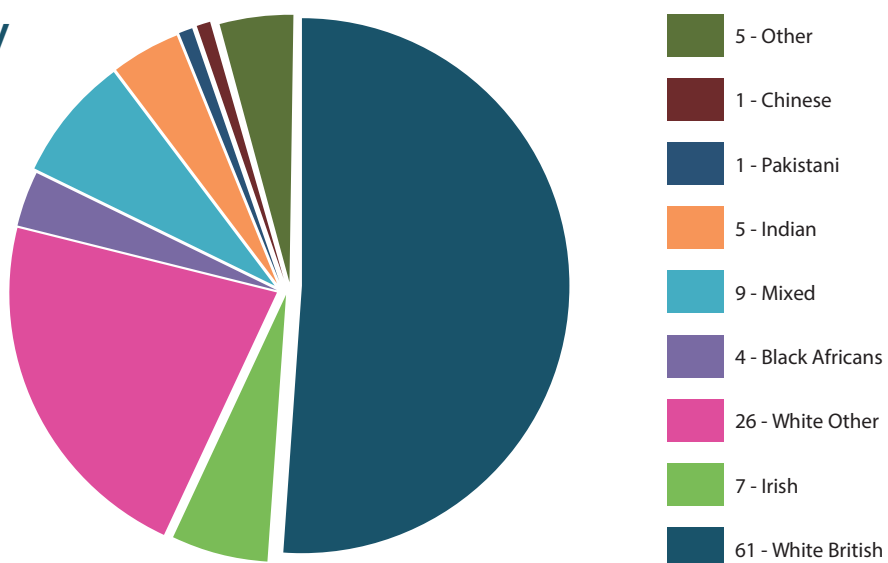
### Gender



### Age



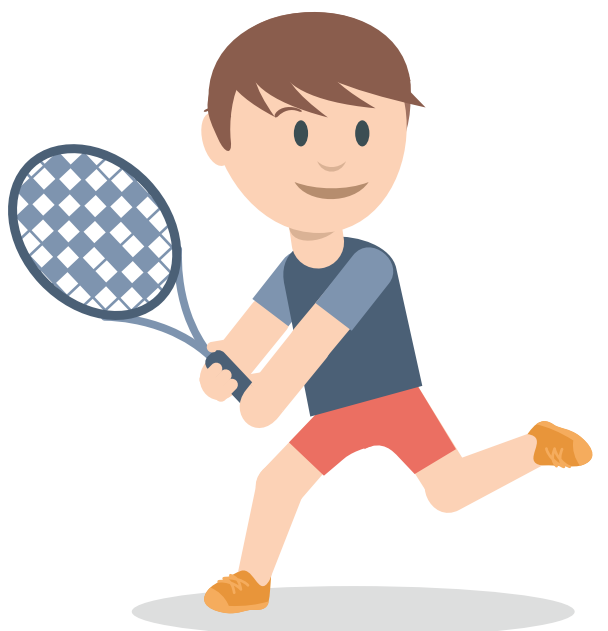
### Ethnicity



## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on what we learned from the children at the workshops, we feel that there could be a big advantage to educating young children about healthy eating in order to help combat health problems in later life. There was often surprise at the amounts of sugar and salts in foods and many of the children didn't know how to read labels to find nutritional value and the content of fats, salt and sugars. It could be also worth holding sessions with parents and teaching assistants to help reinforce healthy eating habits - especially in areas of high deprivation. Therefore we recommend the following:

- All school children to be educated around healthy eating as an ongoing project - not a one off session.
- Schools to allow children to bring in water and fruit in to have during lesson times - this would encourage children who may not drink much water or eat much fruit to do so.
- Schools to review their packed lunch and dinner time policies.
- Schools to be encouraged to take part in the Daily Mile initiative.



# healthwatch

## Bromley

Food For Thought Survey - Schools

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

What do you usually eat for breakfast? \_\_\_\_\_

How do you get to school? \_\_\_\_\_

What activities do you do outside of school? \_\_\_\_\_

How many portions of fruit and veg do you eat a day? \_\_\_\_\_

How many cups of water do you drink a day? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you go to the dentist? \_\_\_\_\_

How many times a week do you have fast food/takeaways? \_\_\_\_\_

What is something that you have learned today? \_\_\_\_\_

What might stop you and your friends from eating healthily and exercising?

## Acknowledgements

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