



early years nutrition
partnership

Mealtime Observations

Report for No.9 The Nursery,
South Croydon

Date: 16th May 2023



Why do we do mealtime observations?

A mealtime observation is an important part of the quality mark. It will help us to assess the nursery against a large proportion of the non-food-based criteria and offer suggestions for improvement.

How is this linked to the Quality Mark Criteria?

The criteria that can be supported by the mealtime observation are:

Food setting	Encouraging positive eating habits	Social occasion/independence
NF01	NF04	NF09
NF02	NF05	NF10
NF03	NF06	NF11
	NF07	NF12
	NF08	NF13
		NF14

It has been almost 4 years since my first mealtime observation at Number 9, and due to COVID this was the last in person observation. Since then the nursery has grown in numbers, and it was delightful to see how the staff across all rooms have grown in confidence with regards to mealtimes and knowledge around healthy eating and nutrition

During my observation on 16/5/23, I was able to observe mealtimes in the baby room, and both pre-school dining areas.

In the baby room, I joined the children when they were all seated in highchairs (younger children) or low chairs (older children). Children were either feeding themselves using appropriate cutlery, or were being fed by members of staff. The staff were sitting on the floor with the children, and encouraging them to eat. Other staff members ensured that children had more food if they wanted it, and helped to clear away and give out dessert when appropriate. The staff were excellent in ensuring that all children were engaged and focused on their meals – if a child became distracted, they were quickly engaged by a member of staff.

In the pre-school rooms children were sat in groups of between 2 and 6 at tables laid out with coloured placemats. All children had washed their hands, and took their seats carefully. Staff held the childrens attention by singing a song which required the children to take notice and join in. The staff then began distributing the meals. I particularly liked that staff put bread on the tables but children knew that they were not allowed to touch or take a piece until they had their plate in front of them. Staff then asked who was vegetarian – children knew and put up their hands. This showed great independence.

The meals were distributed by staff quickly, and children were expected to say thank you. It would have been good to see self serving of the main meal, however the manager reassured me that this usually does happen, and she would ensure that the staff were aware.

Children sat at mixed tables but I observed there were good eaters sitting with more picky eaters. Only one child had a food allergy in the room that I observed. Her dessert was served in a red bowl to differentiate from the group, but she was sitting with other children and not made to feel different. Staff reassured her that her dessert was the same as the others but that they made sure it was safe for her because she couldn't have pineapple. Children (apart from the child with an allergy) shared fruit from a platter and were encouraged to take a few pieces and then share with their friends.

During the meal in the 2nd pre school room, children discussed healthy food with Denise, and talked about which foods they liked. Denise was very clear with the children that foods like chocolate and sweets were OK to have sometimes, but that you shouldn't have too much. This was really nice to hear a balanced approach. Denise also praised one child who ate his meal very well and was offered a second helping. This helped to encourage others to try a bit more. After the meal children cleared away their own plates, scraping food into the bin and giving their plates to a member of staff for washing. Slower eaters were allowed to take their time, and weren't rushed to finish their meal. Other children were respectful to this, and were happy to go about their own clearing up around this. Children were offered dinosaur stickers at the end if they had tried their food and helped clear up. This was great to see and didn't pressurise the children to have eaten everything.

My observations on the mealtime are recorded on the next two pages. I observed excellent practice from all the staff in both age groups. Encouragement of self-serving, and sharing was excellent, and it was also good to see praise for the better eaters on the tables. Food was never used as a reward or punishment which was very positive.

My recommendations for minor improvements to align with the Quality Mark could be:-

- 1) A bit more discussion about what the children are eating. Although staff told the children what it was they didn't go into detail – what type of fish, what vegetables were there, how is the bread made etc?
- 2) Using mealtimes to learn numbers, colours, textures can help encourage children to try new foods. Introducing a 'tuff tray' with the ingredients of the meal might help children to understand where their food comes from and also to count ingredients/ colours etc

Criteria	Yes	No	Not Observed	Comments/suggestions
Do staff ensure children wash their hands before eating?	Y			All children washed their hands with soap and water before sitting down at the tables
Is the environment clean bright and warm?	Y			Yes, rooms were clean, bright and warm.
Are distractions limited as much as reasonably possible?	Y			Children know that it's time to sit down and have lunch, and hand washing marks the start of this time. In the baby room, the table is in one corner of the room to minimise distraction
Are children sat in groups at a table?	Y			Yes, groups of no more than 6 children at each table. Children appeared to choose their seats but staff encouraged certain children to sit near to them to help with encouraging good eating.
Are children supervised whilst eating?	Y			At least 4 members of staff were in the rooms at all times. Some conversation between staff and children was observed.
Are appropriate bowls, cups. Cutlery and utensils used?	Y			Pre-school children were using cutlery which was appropriate size. Plates and cups all appropriate size and material. Babies had appropriate bowls and spoons.
Are children involved in the set up and clear up process?	Y			Set up was not observed but all children cleared up at the end of lunch and didn't leave their place until the room was clear.
Are children encouraged to self-serve?	Y			Staff served the main course from a shared pot. All children served themselves bread from shared 'pot' in the centre of the table. They were encouraged to have more if they had finished and could help themselves to more bread.
Are second helpings of the main course offered when requested?	Y			Second helpings actively encouraged and praised. Fussier eaters were encouraged to try a little more, or to taste something new. Staff knew children's appetites well and were quick to encourage children who needed it.
Is dessert offered to all children even if they haven't finished their main course?	Y			Children were encouraged to eat as much as they could of the main course but no-one was penalised if they hadn't finished. All children were offered dessert.
Are dessert portions kept small for those who haven't finished their main course?			X	Self-served so all children were told to take a few pieces of fruit and then pass to their friends.



Are children allowed to eat at their own pace?	Y			Yes all children allowed to eat at their own pace. Staff were aware of those children who needed more encouragement, and extra support and help was offered to these children.
Is food used as a reward, treat or punishment?		N		Food wasn't used as a reward, treat or punishment. Pre school children were offered stickers for good eating.
Is there discussion around food, taste, texture, ingredients etc?	Y			There was some discussion around the taste of the meal, and how delicious it was. More discussion around ingredients would be beneficial
Are staff sat with the children whilst eating?	Y			Baby room staff sat with children. Pre school staff were all standing in the main room. In the 2 nd room, staff sat down but not at the tables with the children.
Do staff converse with the children and encourage table manners	Y			Staff continuously conversed with the children during the meal, encouraging them to continue eating, try a little more or to see how well another child was doing. Children were expected to use their cutlery, and to say please and thank you.
Are fussy eaters sat with children who eat well?	Y			Fussy eaters were seated with other children who ate well. Lots of encouragement was offered to the fussier children, plus lots of praise to the better eaters which had a positive effect on the fussy eaters.
Are fussy eaters offered smaller portions?	Y			All children given similar portions of the main course but self-served their bread. I did feel that some children only ate bread and didn't really try the main course. When bread is freely available this is an issue.

Special Diets

- 1) Are photographs and dietary notes provided to all staff to highlight children with special dietary requirements or allergies?

Yes photos of children are displayed in the kitchen and all food plated up in the kitchen for any child with special dietary needs

- 2) Are parents, carers and health professionals all engaged to provide the best individualised nutritional management of children with special dietary requirements?

Children with medically diagnosed allergies and intolerances have care plans in place

- 3) Regular updates provided to parents of children with allergies etc on how their child is eating?

Not observed

Non Food-Based Standards

- 1) Are there positive prompts for healthy eating within eating areas e.g posters about fruit and veg etc?

The pre school room has 'healthy food' as their home corner theme. As parents are not allowed on the premises at the moment there isn't a display on healthy eating however the manager will make use of the hallway TV to give more information about menus and healthy eating going forward.

- 2) A member of staff is appointed as the nutrition lead to take responsibility for nutrition issues and to be the main point of contact for parents

This previously was Emma – please appoint a new nutrition lead (perhaps Jana?)

- 3) Parents – sessions held around healthy eating, cooking and lifestyles/ involved in educational activities in the setting around healthy eating, cooking and where food comes from?

Plans for the future now Number 9 has in house chef and kitchen

- 4) Other aspects of healthy lifestyles are communicated to parents such as physical activity and well being (e.g on website/ posters)

Accreditation with EYNP highlighted on website as are activities that are offered in the nursery

- 5) Parents and children are involved in menu planning, are given the opportunity to make suggestions e.g. via formal feedback/ suggestions box

New chef in place so this is something that will be trialled.

- 6) All staff undertake annual CPD in relation to food and nutrition. The nutrition lead is responsible for ensuring all staff have this knowledge

Training is important to Number 9. All staff have undertaken training on allergies recently and the manager has asked for opportunities for staff to learn more about nutrition via EYNP

- 7) Include age-appropriate activities about healthy eating and where food comes from with children at least once per week

Home corner activities on healthy eating. New chef would like to start cooking activities with the children

- 8) Include age-appropriate healthy eating cooking activities for children every week

As above

- 9) Give children the opportunity to get involved in growing food and to taste what is grown

TBC