

# Close to home

One nursery group in Liverpool is winning over children and parents with its healthy eating approach that accommodates home routines, writes *Karen Faux*

**B**randing a young child as a ‘fussy eater’ can become a self-fulfilling prophecy and it is something that the four-strong Honey Pot Day Nurseries group in Liverpool makes sure it avoids. With its commitment to serving organic produce, freshly prepared by its professionally trained chefs, creating adventurous taste buds is as much about working with parents as it is about educating children in the setting.

Keeping a friendly, open dialogue with parents about all things food-related often leads to parents making happy discoveries. Co-owner and area manager Jenna Geggie says, ‘Recently one of our staff reported that during a handover with a parent, the parent was very surprised to learn that her child had eaten all of the home-made fish pâté on toast for their tea-time snack. The staff member explained that she had been reluctant to try it at first but, with encouragement, and with the child watching all of her peers eating it, she soon tried it and ate it all.’

The staff member gave the parent a copy of the recipe for home-made fish pâté on toast (see ‘Cookery corner’) and suggested that they could try it at home, gently reminding the child that she ate it all up in nursery. The parent commented that it worked brilliantly and now she often makes it at home.

## FLEXIBLE EATING

When a child joins Honey Pot, parents sit down with their key person and complete an ‘all about me’ form. This details the child’s routines at home, including meals, and helps to

prompt informal discussion about the types and timings of the meals and snacks offered. At this point parents also receive menus on email.

By talking to the parent, the child’s key person aims to establish how home routines will fit in with those in the nursery. If changes are needed, these will be accommodated. In each of the nurseries, there is a display board which features a visual time-line of when meals and snacks are served, while the use of daily diaries documents what, how much and times that children eat.

Mrs Geggie says, ‘Generally we find parents are happy for their child to be served meals at the same time as the other children. However, on the occasions where the home routine does not reflect those in the nursery, and parents wish for their routine to be followed, we assure them that their child will still be encouraged to sit alongside the other children for the social benefit of eating together, and we offer them the possibility of a small snack or fruit being served.’



**Honey Pot has won accolades for its approach to food, and children take part in planting and growing sessions**

The menus are displayed in each setting with copies for the parents to take home. The nursery chef is responsible for keeping the display board up to date with details of the particular week’s menus, and ensuring all of the information is accurate.

While feedback from parents is extremely positive, there were some minor teething problems. Mrs Geggie says, ‘When the menu was first implemented, we faced a little resistance from a parent who held the view that some of the ingredients being used were “adult foods”, which was why his child was not always eating all of his meals and snacks. We invited him into the setting to discuss his concerns around the ingredients used in the menus, and he commented that he felt courgette and aubergine are foods which adults eat, not children.’

‘He suggested that we have more child-friendly meals available such as fish fingers, pizza and chips, and that his child would then eat all of

## ON THE MENU FOR PARENTS

At Honey Pot Day Nurseries, parents receive:

- copies of the four-weekly menus on enrolment
- copies of the weekly menus, if they wish, but these are also displayed in each setting
- a nursery app with copies of the menus available to download
- daily diaries detailing exactly what, when and how much food each child has eaten that day
- recipes to take home, if they want to have a go at cooking their child’s favourite nursery meal
- colour-coded menus showing exactly what food groups are used in each dish, along with allergen advice on all menus
- full feedback from staff at the end of each session

about what their child has eaten

- a monthly newsletter called ‘News from the kitchen’. It details information about the foods used, menus and the produce currently growing. This includes ‘specials’ which use ingredients that are ready to be harvested in the allotment patch in the nursery gardens.



his meals.' She adds that once the policy on the importance of healthy eating was explained, the parent was happy for his child to be encouraged to try different foods. 'After a short period of adjustment for the child, he soon started eating all of his meals at nursery,' she says.

A monthly email newsletter that goes out to parents about everything food-related has proved very popular. 'Parents really enjoy reading it,' says Mrs Geggie. 'We have had parents responding to say how good it is to see the nursery mirroring the thought and effort that goes into meal planning at home.'

### SOCIAL GATHERINGS

Honey Pot has been creative in thinking about ways in which it can engage all parents – both inside and outside of the nursery day. When it comes to parents' evenings, the nursery cooks, and its resident food and nutrition manager, Mrs Geggie's husband Michael, attend parents' evenings, and now they are also busy developing food workshops.

Mrs Geggie says, 'Michael recently held a workshop for parents to teach them about children's food and nutrition, and offered samples of foods we provide. He is always contactable directly on email, should any parents need advice or have any questions.'

It is good to see fathers in particular taking a healthy interest in their children's diets. Honey Pot's 'dads come for tea' and 'meal times with grandparents' sessions, have proved popular, and its social gatherings based around food include regular

fundraising events for a pre-school in Uganda.

'In an upcoming event, children and parents are invited into the setting for a "taste of Uganda", when we will be serving traditional Ugandan food and learning African dancing,' says Mrs Geggie. 'Each term, parents are invited into the forest to join in with a Forest School session. They are encouraged to sit around the campfire and enjoy food cooked by the Forest School leader and the children.'

A strength of the nursery's approach is that the children themselves are very much involved in decision-making when it comes to what they would like to eat. The weekly children's choice menu, and restaurant days, enable them to make choices and decisions on meal plans, and have their voices heard.

Mrs Geggie says, 'Each week, children enjoy a planting and growing session with Michael. They grow seeds and different herbs, which they can use in their cooking. They recently helped to grow a basil plant to make fresh pesto for their chicken and pesto pasta, which they later enjoyed for lunch. Each month they also take part in bread-baking sessions with Michael, where he teaches them fun and healthy ways in which they can incorporate vegetables and herbs they are growing into bread. The bread is then used the next morning.'

She adds, 'These activities give children the opportunity to develop their tastes and take control of what they like to eat. We're not surprised that some of our parents tell us their children eat better than they do.' ■

## MORE INFORMATION

- **Honey Pot Day Nurseries** is a family-run business, owned by Jenna Geggie and her sister Melissa Kalli, who both work as area managers. The group was highly commended in the Food category of the Nursery World Awards 2016. It has recently been awarded the Children's Food Trust's 'Eat better, start better' award for its commitment to providing balanced food and a 'whole' approach to children's healthy eating and routines in the early years. Its healthy-eating ethos includes a strong focus on supporting breastfeeding. See <http://blog.honeypotnursery.co.uk>

## NURSERY WORLD AWARDS 2017

- The Nursery World Awards 2017, including the category for Nursery Food, are now open for entries. Go to [www.nurseryworldawards.com](http://www.nurseryworldawards.com)

# Cookery corner



PHOTO ADOBESTOCK

**Use smoked mackerel or trout**

### Home-made fish pâté

Our home-made fish pâté is one of the children's favourite tea-time treats and is generally very popular with all age groups. We serve it on wholemeal crispbreads with tomatoes and cucumber.

### Ingredients

- ✓ 115g (4oz) smoked mackerel or trout
- ✓ 2 tbsp natural yoghurt spread
- ✓ 2 tbsp cream cheese
- ✓ Seedless cucumber
- ✓ Pinch of paprika
- ✓ Salad to garnish
- ✓ Wholemeal crispbread

### Method

- ✓ Place mackerel/trout, natural yoghurt and cream cheese into a processor and blend for approximately ten seconds.
- ✓ Take the mixture out and place in a bowl. Add a pinch of paprika and grate the cucumber into the mixture until you achieve the desired texture.
- ✓ Spread onto wholemeal crispbreads and serve with a salad as a garnish.