"The provision of healthy meals at school is a vital issue, and we are pleased to have had a chance to contribute to this exercise."

"Our appraisal of the nutrient, energy and salt content of the lunch boxes has been done in part by analysis and in part by consideration of label details and reference literature information. The results show them to comply closely over a period of weeks with the guidance on healthy eating at school."

"The challenge of providing lunchboxes that meet the guidelines, while at the same time appealing to the children who are going to eat them, would appear to have been met."

"We wish the project continuing success. Regards and good luck"

Bob Stevens - County Analyst
Worcestershire Scientific Services
Introduction

Prior to Food Awareness Week, the trading standards food team carried out a survey of packed lunches consumed at a local junior school.

Samples of lunchbox foods were taken from the children that volunteered and the equivalent foods were test purchased by Trading Standards, to send for analysis.

Each lunchbox was analysed as a whole meal, in itself, and was offset against the ‘Healthy Eating Guidelines’ set out by the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

The aim of the project was to obtain a ‘snapshot’ of what children would normally bring to school for lunch, and to reinforce the message of healthy eating to parents and children; it is hoped that individuals that learn to eat healthily at an early age grow up to be healthy adults as well.

Previous studies by the FSA showed that children who were taking packed lunches to school were still eating too much fat, salt and sugar in one meal.

The analysis, carried out in a food laboratory, involved ‘re-creating’ the lunchbox as a whole meal, including sandwiches and drinks and then testing them for their collective levels of calories, fat, carbohydrates and salt.
Calories

- Energy in food is measured in either in kilojoules (kJ) or kilocalories (kcal).

- If you eat high calorie foods, it is extremely important that you match this consumption with a sufficient amount of physical activity.

- Failure to ‘burn off’ these calories could result in a build of excess amounts of different foods (e.g. fat, sugars, etc.), which can be detrimental to the body.

- The FSA guideline for calorific content, in a single meal, for a 7-10 year old child is 557kcal.
The horizontal line at point “0”, in the graph below, represents the 557g, FSA guideline.

The results are calculated for each meal on their percentage amount over or below this guideline amount.

These results are offset against the guideline amount. [Results above the line would need to be matched with additional physical activity]
Fat

- It is important when trying to maintain a healthy diet to eat products that are low in saturated fat.

- Fat can be divided up into two types, ‘Saturated’ and ‘Unsaturated’ fat.

- Saturated fat is usually found in lard, butter, hard margarine, cheese, whole milk and anything that contains these ingredients, such as cakes, chocolate, biscuits, pies and pastries).

- The fat on red meat and under poultry skin is also saturated fat.

High intakes of saturated fat have been linked to an increased risk of coronary heart disease.
Unsaturated fat is a healthier alternative to saturated fat; it generally comes from vegetable sources.

Unsaturated fat can be divided into two groups - 'monounsaturated' and 'polyunsaturated' fats.

They can be found in vegetable oils such as sesame, sunflower, soya and olive oils; oily fish, such as mackerel, sardines, pilchards and salmon; and soft margarine.

It is worth noting that most products contain both saturated and unsaturated fat,

So sometimes food labels will declare the type of fat that is most predominant in the product.

For example, a product declared as containing unsaturated fat may also contain saturated fat, but in a lesser amount.

It is therefore important to reduce the amount of fat consumed to a healthy level.