

Best Practice

Larder Cymru

WELSH FOOD FOR SCHOOLS



2026

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01248 725 700

Neuadd Y Dref, Sgwâr Bulkeley, Llangefni, Ynys Môn LL77 7LR

www.mentermon.com



The Larder Cymru Welsh Food for Schools initiative works with local authorities, suppliers, and stakeholders across Wales to increase the use of Welsh produce in school meals.

Through a range of pilot activities, engagement programmes, and collaborative initiatives, the programme identifies and shares effective practices that support local food procurement while delivering positive outcomes for learners, communities, and the environment.

Our Fresh Produce Street Food Trial, delivered during the 2025–26 academic year, is one such initiative. It has shown how introducing vibrant, fresh, locally sourced street food options in Welsh secondary schools can make healthier choices both attractive and accessible to learners.

This work reflects our wider commitment to building a more resilient and self-reliant food system in Wales that keeps more of the public spending value within communities – supporting local growers and producers, whilst reducing environmental impact. By shortening supply chains and prioritising Welsh food, the initiative has helped improve the quality and sustainability of school meals, contributing to a stronger foundational economy across Wales.

The initiative has also provided insight into how the secondary school food offer can be developed in a way that aligns with the evolving needs and preferences of young people. By combining innovation in menu design with a clear focus on local sourcing and wellbeing, we can support the long-term ambition of creating a healthier Wales, where good food, local enterprise, and environmental responsibility are intrinsically linked. This report brings together some of the most effective and innovative examples from the Street Food Trial across Wales.

“The Fresh Produce Street Food Trials represent an important step in our work to support the evolution of the school food offer in Wales, particularly within secondary schools where engagement and uptake of school meals have potential for significant growth. By piloting innovative approaches across Wales, we have been able to test how fresh, locally sourced ingredients can be presented in a way that resonates with secondary school learners – through formats that are familiar, on trend, accessible and are appealing.

“These trials are not just about introducing new menu items, they are about rethinking how young people connect with food through healthier meal options, that are current, and more relevant to their everyday choices and influences. Working closely with local authority catering teams, suppliers, and schools, we have explored how street food-style provisions can sit alongside existing services whilst still meeting nutritional and procurement standards.

“Larder Cymru continues to act as an enabler, creating new opportunities for Welsh businesses and suppliers to engage and access public sector markets. By aligning innovation in menu development with supply chain engagement, the trials demonstrate how we can simultaneously support healthier eating behaviours, strengthen local economies, and contribute to a more sustainable food system across Wales.”

David Wylie
Project Manager Larder Cymru

Fresh local food on the menu for Gwynedd schools

Seasonal Welsh produce is taking centre stage in school kitchens across Gwynedd through a series of pilot projects designed to support healthier eating, strengthen local supply chains, and reduce food waste.

During the year, Cyngor Gwynedd worked alongside Larder Cymru – Welsh Food for Schools initiative to explore new ways of connecting learners with locally sourced food. The pilot, currently underway at Ysgol Friars, Bangor, has introduced a new street food bar aimed at making healthy choices more appealing and accessible to secondary learners.

The project forms part of a wider ambition to increase the use of Welsh produce in school meals while helping young people better understand the relationship between food, farming, and their local communities.

Councillor Dewi Jones visited the school to see the initiative in action and meet the catering team who deliver the project day-to-day.

Following his visit he said: “The wellbeing of our learners is at the heart of everything we do. Providing fresh, local vegetables on their plates not only supports their health but also opens their eyes to the connection between food, the land, and their community.”

Alongside the Larder Cymru project, Gwynedd schools have also been participating in the Welsh Vegetables in Schools scheme, which aims to increase the amount of organically grown Welsh vegetables used in school meals. The initiative supports local growers while reducing reliance on imported produce and improving access to fresh, high-quality ingredients.



Produce is delivered directly to schools by Harlech Foodservice, helping ensure that kitchens can source fresh Welsh produce efficiently and consistently.

Together, the projects are helping to reshape the role of school meals – demonstrating how catering services can support learner wellbeing while also contributing to local economic growth and environmental sustainability.

The success of the pilot has also reflected the commitment and enthusiasm of school catering staff, whose work continues to play a vital role in providing nutritious and sustainable meals for learners across Gwynedd.

“By listening to pupils and responding directly to their expressed views, Ysgol Friars has shaped a food offer that is more varied, appealing and rooted in pupil voice.”



Gwynedd

Welsh produce and new menu choices in Torfaen schools.

Local ingredients and more flexible meal options are helping to broaden choice for learners in Torfaen schools through a pilot focused on baked potatoes and salad boxes.

During the spring term this year, Torfaen Catering Services introduced new menu options at Ysgol Abersychan and Ysgol Gymraeg Gwynllyw. The aim was to give pupils more appealing everyday choices while increasing the use of Welsh produce where possible. The pilot began in March and forms part of a wider effort to make school meals more responsive to learner preferences as well as supporting sustainable sourcing.

The new offer includes baked potatoes with a range of hot and cold fillings and salad boxes with a variety of proteins, creating a more flexible service that can appeal to different tastes. Local ingredients used in the updated menu include Welsh potatoes, Welsh cheese and Welsh sausages.

The trial has had a noticeable impact on pupil food choices and waiting times. The introduction of an additional service point has helped reduce queues, making the lunchtime experience more efficient and giving learners quicker access to food and more time to spend with friends.

Feedback has been positive, particularly around the wider choice of toppings. During a pupil council meeting, learners welcomed the shorter queues and said they enjoyed the new menu options. Pupils are also helping to shape the next phase of the offer through a school survey exploring future topping and salad choices.

Staff feedback has also been positive, with the new options proving popular across the school community.

The pilot has also highlighted both the opportunities and challenges of sourcing local ingredients. While Welsh products such as jacket potatoes, cheese and sausage have been successfully included, the team noted that some items, particularly salad ingredients, are more difficult to source locally. Where Welsh produce has not been available, more sustainable alternatives such as Red Tractor meat have been used.

Together, the changes are showing how relatively simple menu innovations can improve the dining experience for learners while supporting healthier choices, more efficient service and a stronger focus on sustainable food sourcing in schools.

Torfaen





Innovative project spices up school menus across the Vale of Glamorgan

Street food-inspired dishes and innovative menu development along with local ingredients are helping to transform school dining experiences across the Vale of Glamorgan through a successful partnership between local Big Fresh Catering and food producer BANG! Curry.

As part of the Larder Cymru – Welsh Food for Schools initiative, Big Fresh Catering has been exploring new ways to encourage learners to choose healthy school meals while increasing the use of fresh Welsh produce and supporting local suppliers. Big Fresh Catering delivers meals across six secondary schools and 63 primary schools in the Vale of Glamorgan and is also part of the Welsh Veg in Schools scheme.

The project centred on introducing pupils to new flavours and cuisines through a collaboration with BANG! Curry, which produces natural, vegan and gluten-free curry bases and spice blends. The initiative began at St Richard Gwyn Catholic High School, where catering teams worked alongside BANG! Curry to develop dishes that would appeal to young people while maintaining high nutritional standards.

Using fresh tomatoes, peppers, carrots and other vegetables supplied through local distributor Castell Howell, chefs created tasty curry dishes that incorporated additional vegetables into sauces, helping to boost vegetable consumption among learners. Popular menu items included chicken biryani, vegetable curries and creative street-food style options inspired by global cuisines.

Before introducing the dishes to the menu, Big Fresh organised tasting and sampling sessions with pupils, allowing them to try recipes and provide feedback. The success of the pilot led to the project being rolled out across seven schools in the county, with regular curry-themed menu days now taking place in secondary schools.

“We are always looking for ways to encourage learners to stay on site and choose healthy school meals,” explained Pamela Jones from the Big Fresh Catering team. “Street-food style dishes and global flavours are proving popular with many young people, and projects like this help us introduce healthier ingredients in ways that pupils enjoy.”

The initiative has also provided valuable opportunities for food education, encouraging learners to explore different cuisines while highlighting the importance of fresh ingredients and locally sourced produce. Parent engagement has formed part of the project too, with sampling sessions held during parents’ evenings to gather wider feedback and encourage support for healthier school meal choices.

The project highlights how collaboration between schools, local authorities and food businesses can support healthier eating, increase the use of Welsh produce and create exciting new dining experiences for learners. It also shows how innovative approaches to menu development can help school catering services remain relevant and responsive to the needs of young people.

Vale of Glamorgan



"Catering teams worked to develop dishes that would appeal to young people while maintaining high nutritional standards."

Larder Cymru trial brings new identity to school meals in Caerphilly

A street food-inspired school catering trial at Ysgol Islwyn, Caerphilly is helping to reimagine the secondary school dining experience through new branding, pupil engagement and a refreshed menu offer.

Developed as part of the Larder Cymru – Welsh Food for Schools initiative, the project responds to the needs of a large secondary school site with over 1,000 pupils and approximately 900 meals served daily. With limited indoor dining space, many pupils eat outside, which created an opportunity to rethink how food is presented and accessed within the school environment.

Central to the project is the introduction of a “Bocs Bwyd / Food Box” pod, designed with direct input from pupils. Learners were actively involved in shaping the look, feel and identity of the catering offer, helping to ensure the final concept reflected their preferences and expectations.

The new branding was developed to feel distinct from traditional school catering, creating a modern identity that is instantly recognisable to pupils. Under the umbrella brand ‘Shack Byrbryd’, menus and visual layouts were standardised to create consistency across service points, strengthening recognition and reinforcing the overall concept.



The menu itself was designed to reflect the street food theme, offering familiar, popular meals such as wraps, burritos, baked potatoes using Welsh ingredients, and taco bowls. Tasting and informal feedback from pupils helped to shape both the design and the food offer, ensuring the trial remained responsive to learner preferences.

The trial shows how combining pupil-led design, strong visual identity and flexible menu development can increase the appeal of school meals. It also highlights the potential for street food-inspired concepts to increase engagement, strengthen branding, and support the continued use of local Welsh produce within school catering services.

Caerphilly

Tŷ Tatws bringing fresh Welsh produce to secondary school menus

The new street food-style offer is also helping secondary schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf make school meals more appealing, while increasing the use of Welsh ingredients and supporting healthier lunchtime choices.

The pilot has been introduced across three schools – Porth Community School, Bryncelynnog Comprehensive and St John the Baptist Comprehensive – with a new branded “Tŷ Tatws” station refreshing the way jacket potatoes are presented and promoted.

Launched in April 2026, the approach gives a familiar, nutritious and filling school meal a more contemporary identity, using a high street-style food brand to make the option feel more relevant and attractive to secondary pupils.

*Rhondda
Cynon
Taf*

Welsh ingredients are at the heart of the offer. The potatoes and cheese are sourced from Wales, complementing other popular fillings such as tuna mayonnaise.

Launch events in each school helped promote Tŷ Tatws, and pupil feedback has so far been positive. Learners described the new look as contemporary, colourful and appealing, with some saying it looked like a high street food brand or something they would see on social media. Early data also suggests that there has been an increase in take-up since the launch.

Staff feedback has also been encouraging. At Porth Community School, Headteacher Laura Dober said she loved the branding and felt the high street look appealed far more to pupils. Promotion through school communications and staff newsletters has led to interest from other comprehensive schools.

The project was developed by working with school catering and nutrition staff to ensure it remains practical, affordable and aligned with food and drink standards.

Together, the three-school pilot shows how strong branding, Welsh produce and pupil-friendly presentation can modernise secondary school meals while supporting healthier choices, affordability and local sourcing.



Fresh thinking for school food in Wales

What the Larder Cymru Fresh Produce Street Food Trial revealed about making Welsh food more appealing and accessible in secondary schools



Street food formats work

Wraps, curry dishes, salad boxes and branded jacket potatoes helped make healthier school meals feel current, relevant and appealing to young people.



Welsh produce on the menu

Welsh vegetables, cheese and meat were introduced into supply chains, supporting more local and sustainable sourcing.



Concepts and branding make a difference

Projects like Bocs Bwyd / Food Box, and Tŷ Tatws showed how visual identity can help school food feel more like a high-street or restaurant chain offer.



Partnership unlocks innovation

Local authorities, schools, caterers and Welsh food businesses worked together to test practical ideas that can be adapted elsewhere.



Pupil voice improves the offer

Tasting sessions, surveys and pupil feedback helped shape menus, branding and service design.



Promoting healthy choices

Pupils shifted towards healthier options following the introduction of street food meals served with fruit or salad.



Across the pilot areas, the trial showed growth. There was a 70% increase in uptake of themed-day meals in the Vale of Glamorgan, a 31% rise in jacket potato sales at one Rhondda Cynon Taf school, and five times more pupils choosing specific menu items in Torfaen.

The trials show that when Welsh produce, pupil insight and strong design come together, healthier school meals can feel more exciting, while supporting local suppliers across Wales.