



Jenny Pittam

Interim Head of Contract Services

My name is Jenny Pittam and I am the Head of Contract Catering Services working within the Children and Culture Directorate.

I have worked at Tower Hamlets for three and a half years and in that time Contract Services has gone through some major organisational changes to address a challenging deficit position. We have however, managed to continue to serve school meals everyday throughout the pandemic – an achievement which the whole catering team are very proud of.

Contract Catering service employs 350 staff and provides meals for 50 primary schools, 11 nurseries and selected special and secondary schools in the borough. We serve on average 17,000 meals a day and all of our meals are freshly cooked healthy and inspiring.

All ingredients used in our menus are halal and Contract Catering Services holds The Soil Association's Food for Life Silver Award — recognition that we are a provider of high-quality local food whereby ingredients are sourced sustainably and from ethical suppliers. At least five per cent of the budget goes towards organic food items and the Award also demonstrates we exceed the Government's minimum standard for school meals.

Each day, school lunches in Tower Hamlets follow a theme such as "Planet Earth Day" which is our meat free day or 'Traditional', which is dedicated to British classics such as the roast dinner, by far and away the children's favourite. We also celebrate other global cultures and cuisines ranging from African to Italian and Japanese to American. The themes are important, reflecting the diversity of our local population and catering to every religion, culture and palate in Tower Hamlets. We also cater for a growing range of allergies/special diets and we have a specialist Barts NHS Nutritionist who prepares customised menus for children with allergies.

The day starts early for each Head of Kitchen, who arrives in the morning to freshly prepare the food, before being joined by catering assistants who will assist with the food preparation leading up to the meals service at midday.

Many of our staff will have worked for us preparing and serving school meals for 20 years or more and they have a real sense of pride and purpose about what they do.

School meals are so important to the health and wellbeing of our borough's young people and in Tower Hamlets all meals are free to Primary School pupils. As a result, take up of school meals is very high and we benefit from a vibrant school meals culture in our school dining rooms.

A freshly cooked, healthy and varied school meal supports learning in many ways, ranging from the opportunity to make healthy choices and taste new foods and sit and socialise with friends to the ability to focus in class, where food will have fuelled their minds for learning.