

27th October 2023



School Canteen Infrastructure and Staffing

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As you are aware Rathfriland High School has experienced significant and sustained growth in recent years, reflected by an increase to our permanent intake and enrolment numbers by the Department of Education last year. The increasing number of pupils, along with the popularity of the school meals service, at both break and lunchtime, has placed ever growing demands on the school canteen.

The building, dating back to 1961, has remained largely unchanged, in relation to its size and facilities. This makes it difficult to accommodate our current pupil numbers and provide the standard of service both the school and the catering team would wish to offer. We have taken all available steps to alleviate the problem, including the introduction of a split lunch period during the 2020/21 school year and our continued practice of allowing Year 8 to join the queue slightly early at 1pm.

I have spoken to many of you individually about this issue and wanted to share with you the work which has been taking place behind the scenes, to secure an improvement to our school canteen facilities.

We first approached our managing authority, the Education Authority, in 2016, requesting an extension and upgrade to the canteen. Since then we have worked with the Education Authority to further these plans. This resulted in our request being made a priority for the 2021/22 school year. Due to the unprecedented financial challenges currently facing the Education Authority and the wider education system, a final decision and the commencement of works has been postponed.

I know parents and pupils will share my disappointment with this setback and the continued wait for adequate resources, reflecting the needs of the school. I want to reassure parents that I and the school governors have made representations to senior staff in the Education Authority and to our political representatives on the matter. We have been assured that the extension and refurbishment of the canteen remains a priority and will be carried out when funding becomes available.

Another key challenge facing our schools meals provision currently is that of staffing. We have been seeking to recruit a senior unit supervisor, cook and catering assistants. I previously shared the details of these posts with you, via the app and social media. Despite our best efforts, a number of key vacancies remain. This issue, if unresolved, has the potential to impact on the provision of hot meals in Rathfriland High going forward. I therefore once again appeal to all members of the school community to share details of these vacancies with their friends, family and wider network, in the hope that we can recruit suitable people to fill these important roles. Anyone interested can contact the school for further details and we plan to host a promotion day to support potential applicants after half-term.

May I also take this opportunity to wish you an enjoyable half-term break. We look forward to welcoming your child/children back on Monday 6th November.

Kind regards,

Ian Matthews

Principal