

**What is School Food - Count Me In Month?** During October, all pupils at [school name] will be encouraged to enjoy their entitlement to a free school meal. All pupils will be automatically signed up to be eating school meals during this month, unless their parent or guardian actively opts-out.

**Why is the school implementing School Food - Count Me In Month?** As well as helping families save money on food bills, and time making packed lunches, children eating school meals together can create a positive shared social experience. Plus, you can rest assured your child will have a balanced and nutritious meal due to high nutrition standards.

Now that every child at [school name] is eligible for a free school meal, we want every child and family to give school meals a go, so that they have the opportunity to make the most of these benefits!

**Who organises School Food - Count Me In Month?** School Food - Count Me In Month is organised by Torfaen County Borough Council and Nesta (a charity which supports new ideas that improve people's lives), and in collaboration with [school name]. It was developed following extensive research with parents/guardians and pupils in Torfaen, Caerphilly and Cardiff.

**What provisions will be made for children with allergies, dietary restrictions, or cultural/religious dietary preferences?** Torfaen County Borough Council's catering team works hard to be inclusive and to cater for all pupils. They are confident in catering for pupils who have specific medical requirements, such as allergens, coeliac disease and diabetes. They also cater for pupils who require a different menu for religious, ethical or cultural reasons such as vegetarian or pescatarian. They have systems and procedures in place to ensure that those who require a special diet are catered for safely. This includes employing a dietitian to process these requirements, training all cooks in allergen management, and working closely with suppliers and software providers to ensure records are accurate and any changes updated and communicated to their cooks in real time.

If you would like to discuss any special dietary requirements with the catering team please email TCBC - Special Diet Request [specialdietrequest@torfaen.gov.uk](mailto:specialdietrequest@torfaen.gov.uk), or call the catering office at 01633 647715 (please do not contact [insert name of school]).

You can also find more information on how they cater to special diets here:

<https://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/EducationLearning/SchoolsColleges/Schoolcatering/Special-Diets-Primary-School.aspx>

And how they manage allergens here:

<https://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/EducationLearning/SchoolsColleges/Schoolcatering/Management-of-Allergens.aspx>

**What is the process for opting out?** We encourage parents and guardians to give School Food – “Count Me In Month” a go. Torfaen County Borough Council's catering team would be happy to discuss any concerns you or your child may have and will do what they can to accommodate any special dietary needs.

However, if you would still like to opt-out, you can do so by emailing TCBC - Catering Enquiries [CateringEnquiries@torfaen.gov.uk](mailto:CateringEnquiries@torfaen.gov.uk), or call the catering office at 01633 647715 (please do not contact [insert name of school]).

**What if a child simply doesn't like the food being offered in school meals?** During School Food - Count Me In Month, extra efforts will be taken by catering staff to accommodate pupils' food preferences. Each day there are three menu choices and your child will be able to choose their preferred meal. The catering team will nearly always be able to provide something that even the fussiest of eaters will enjoy. They will not let any child go hungry!

What's more, children are often more open to eating foods they normally wouldn't eat at home, when they are with their school friends all eating the same thing. However, if you are still concerned, our catering team will be more than happy to discuss this with you: TCBC - Catering Enquiries [CateringEnquiries@torfaen.gov.uk](mailto:CateringEnquiries@torfaen.gov.uk), or call the catering office at 01633 647715 (please do not contact [insert name of school]).

**What if a child brings in a packed lunch even though their parent/guardian has not opted-out?** The parent or guardian will be contacted to ensure they are aware of School Food - Count Me In Month and to discuss any concerns they may have.

**Why is the initiative for a whole month? Can it be shorter or more flexible?** It can take a few weeks for anyone to get used to something new. Children's tastes change. A month is a relatively short period of time, and so relatively easy to commit to, but long enough for your child to give school meals a real chance. However, if you're not sure your child can commit to a whole month, we encourage them to just give it a go. You can always opt-out at a later date.

**Have the opinions and concerns of the children themselves been considered in implementing School Food - Count Me In Month?** During the development of School Food - Count Me In Month, Nesta spoke to 80 primary school pupils to understand any potential concerns they will have and to ensure we are able to provide them with the information to assure them. We will explain the initiative to pupils during a special assembly, leaving time for any questions they may have. School staff are aware of School Food - Count Me In Month so that they can answer any questions from pupils.

During School Food - Count Me In Month, extra efforts will be taken by catering staff to accommodate any special dietary needs and food preferences, so please get in touch if you have any concerns about your child's ability to participate by emailing TCBC - Special Diet Request [specialdietrequest@torfaen.gov.uk](mailto:specialdietrequest@torfaen.gov.uk), or call the catering office at 01633 647715 (please do not contact [insert name of school]).

**Can parents and guardians trust that the school meals will be nutritious and of high quality?** Torfaen County Borough Council takes great pride in the school meals they serve. They ensure meals are attractive and nutritionally balanced. Pupils are offered a balanced hot meal-of-the-day with dessert, and fresh water available at all times. An alternative vegetarian option is available every day. Menus have a strong focus on fresh fruit, vegetables and salad. All menus are carefully planned to meet Welsh Government

Nutritional Standards for school lunches and contain on average around a third of pupils' daily nutrient requirements.

You can read more about the Welsh Government's school food nutritional standards here: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/healthy-eating-in-maintained-schools-statutory-guidance-for-local-authorities-and-governing-bodies.pdf>

**How will the school communicate with parents/guardians about this School Food - Count Me In Month?** An email and / or letter about School Food - Count Me In Month will be sent to all parents and guardians. Information posters will also be displayed outside and around [insert school]. As per usual information about school meals, including school menus is available through the council website:

<https://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/EducationLearning/SchoolsColleges/Schoolcatering/School-Meals.aspx>

Nesta will be conducting an evaluation of the School Food - Count Me In Month, a summary of which will be shared with parents/guardians early next year.

If you have any further questions or concerns you would like to discuss please get in touch: TCBC - Catering Enquiries [CateringEnquiries@torfaen.gov.uk](mailto:CateringEnquiries@torfaen.gov.uk), or call the catering office at 01633 647715 (please do not contact [insert name of school]).

**Will there be a way for parents/guardians to provide feedback on the meals and the School Food - Count Me In Month as a whole, and will their input be taken into account for future improvements?** We are eager to hear your feedback about the School Food - Count Me In Month, and understand how it could be improved in the future. At the beginning of November Nesta will share a survey with all parents/guardians. They will also conduct a focus group to understand what you and your child liked, what you disliked and what you would change about the School Food - Count Me In Month in the future.

However, we are eager to hear your feedback on the School Food - Count Me In Month, and school meals more generally, at any time. So please don't hesitate to get in touch by emailing TCBC - Catering Enquiries [CateringEnquiries@torfaen.gov.uk](mailto:CateringEnquiries@torfaen.gov.uk), or call the catering office at 01633 647715 (please do not contact [insert name of school]).