

Junk food food still on the tuck shop menu as... Kids' health bites



Right start: Stella, 7, Dean, 6, and Julia, 11, get stuck into healthy food at Malvern Valley Primary School. Picture: JAKE NOWAKOWSKI

Evonne Barry
education reporter

SCHOOL canteens are still dishing up unhealthy tucker to students — three years after the introduction of strict regulations.

A *Herald Sun* audit of canteen menus found high-fat, high-sugar items were still being served at lunch-time and recess.

The State Government banned the sale of confectionery in 2009 and apart from an initial audit shortly after, has not been monitoring schools' progress.

Dietitian Melanie McGrice studied the canteen menus of more than 60 schools — primary and secondary, public and private — on behalf of the *Herald Sun*.

"Some were just excep-

Menu snakes and ladders

CANTEEN manager Karen Blackman has a simple philosophy on children and junk food.

"It's very rare you will get a kid who will choose a salad over a Kit Kat," Mrs Blackman says.

"So I really think it's up to us to help them." Mum-of-three Mrs Blackman has run the one-day-a-week canteen at Malvern

Valley Primary School for eight years. During that time she has phased out junk food and set up a "canteen garden", which supplies much of the healthy snacks and meals.

A monthly raffle also rewards students who pick the healthiest lunches. Mrs Blackman says "lolly snakes" were probably the most missed

tional, but overall I was pretty disappointed at the quality of canteen menus," Ms McGrice said. "It's been a number of years since the regulations to cut out all confectionery were brought

in, yet we're still seeing some schools doing that."

Under Education Department guidelines, items including pastry-based and crumbed hot food, ice cream, chips, cakes and bis-

confectionery.

"But I think the volunteer parents probably missed them more than the kids," she says. "It does take time, and it was hard to sell the healthy stuff when we were still selling chips and lollies, but the kids now love the menu."

Mrs Blackman said the trick was being creative.

uits, should only be served "occasionally" — or not more than twice a term.

However, Ms McGrice said an overwhelming number of canteens were selling treats every day.

Ms McGrice, from Health Kick Nutrition and Dietetics, said one of the biggest mistakes some canteens made was assuming "low-fat" products were healthy.

"That really bothered me because serving low-fat versions of pies and so forth is a really confusing message for children," Ms McGrice said. "Even if it is lower in fat, it's still not providing children with the important nutrients they need."

A spokesman for Education Minister Martin Dixon said he was not considering another canteen audit.

Tracey Setter from the Victorian Healthy Eating Advisory Service, which provides a free advice service to school canteens, said many people wrongly believed healthy food was more expensive.

THE EXPERT WORD

Dietitian Melanie McGrice assessed the canteen menus of 62 Victorian primary and secondary schools

✓ **PASS**
21%

✗ **FAIL**
11%

✚ **CAN IMPROVE**
67%

HITS

- Raffle tickets for kids who choose 'healthy options'
- School serving wholemeal bread only, no white
- Creative healthy snacks like bags of hot sweet corn, frozen pineapple rings or vegetable batons
- Food for canteen grown in school vegetable patches

MISSES

- Schools selling 'killer pythons', lolly bags
 - 'Meal deal' offering 50c off can of soft drink when they buy a main meal
 - Party pies and bacon and egg rolls listed as foods to be eaten 'regularly'
 - Low-fat (but low nutrition) pastries promoted as healthy foods
 - Iced doughnuts (containing 24 per cent fat) everyday offerings
- Education Department rules apply to public schools, but guidelines also adopted voluntarily by many private schools

WHAT'S OFF THE MENU

BANNED FOODS

- **CONFECTIONERY**
Including chocolate, lollies, bubble gum, yoghurt snacks, sugar-coated nuts, praline, jelly and cough lozenges
- **SOFTDRINKS**
Including energy drinks

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