

WHY INTRODUCE A SELF-SERVICE SYSTEM IN OUR CANTEEN?

For the last 5 years, a team of motivated parents has been working with our school canteen Committee to improve what at the time was considered an unsatisfactory system.

Our main goal was the overall improvement of the food served, for which we have enjoyed two years of support from the Brussels Region programme for sustainable canteens (http://www.restaurationcollectivedurable.be/fr/Collectivites_durables/)

Many changes have been introduced: increasing the amount of fruits and vegetables served in the canteen, big improvements in the use of cooking fats, salad bars for the secondary school... But there is still much to be done.

The evaluations that we conduct regularly (including a survey on the whole school population in June 2013), show that we have a recurrent problem in the refectory Van Houtte (children from P2 to S7), which is the level of service. Indeed, our canteen was been designed, during its construction, for a table service: where children are seated and receive their meals on large dishes. The food is then distributed by staff or teachers in primary, and in secondary, children serve themselves.

This system has many limitations:

- It is difficult to calculate the correct quantities (especially for secondary), and the possibility for second helpings is limited;
- Everything must be prepared in advance and kept in heated carts to be served in one go. Many products suffer in appearance, freshness and taste with this system;
- There is insufficient time for each person at the table to be comfortably served, resulting in stress both for children and staff;
- There is no possibility to offer different choices;
- A break is needed between two services for cleaning and resetting tables, resulting in pressure on the children to finish.
- The canteen staff do their best. However, with people working only two hours a day it is difficult to train them as we would like. There is also a high turnover.

Significantly, this table service costs a third of what we pay for meals for our children.

For the last two years we have been looking for a solution to these problems. After observing other schools of similar size to ours, a **self-service** solution has become evident.

Strong points of self-service distribution:

- Food will be prepared in the kitchen continuously and directly served on plates of children. No more heated carts! Food will gain in nutritional quality, texture, taste and appearance.
- Reduction in waste since cooking follows the demand.
- Possibility of different choices of starters and desserts as well as a second choice of main dish, including a widely requested vegetarian option.
- More appealing system for the secondary.
- Children can obtain second helpings if they wish in a specific queue dedicated to this.
- A significant reduction in the cost of the service. Savings can be reinvested in our quest for fresh, better quality, less processed and organic foods, with increased choice.
- Continuous flow system. No more time lost between the different groups for cleaning and arranging the tables.

The French Lycée in Brussels, whose population is very similar to ours, introduced a high performance self-service in the autumn of 2012. We visited their canteen on several occasions and we are in direct contact with them for the development of our project. Their self-serving children range from P2 to S7 (same levels as ours). It is reassuring to see how even the smallest are managing this without problem. We still plan to give special attention to the younger students: verification of the trays and encouragement of a balanced choice, liquid served at table, via presence of adult supervision during the meal.

Development of the project:

- Technical Study: carried out by the Bureau of French Studies CREACEPT. It comprises a diagnostic phase (June 2013) and a feasibility study (November 2013).
- Financial review
- File with the Régie of buildings
- School organization: several preparatory meetings were already held with various actors in the primary and secondary school.