



THE FOUNDATION FOR CHILDREN'S
FEEDING, EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT

**Helping children
get the fuel
they need to
grow, learn,
and participate**



Registered Charity number 1205834

Our challenge

Feeding skills are fundamental to fuelling children's health, learning and wellbeing. Yet for many children, particularly those with additional medical or special educational needs, developmental differences can make learning to eat far more complex than is often understood

We all recognise that good nutrition underpins every child's ability to grow, participate and reach their full potential. But what happens when children struggle to get the fuel in? Throughout infancy and childhood, children must master many new skills, from walking and talking to learning to eat. When feeding development is disrupted, it can create barriers to nutrition, confidence, participation and learning.



Access to nutritious food is fundamental to fuelling children's health, learning and participation

For many children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), sensory differences, anxiety, developmental and medical needs, learning to eat is far more complex than is often recognised in mainstream food education programmes.



The gap in current support



Feeding development, or **learning to eat**, is a key part of child development but is often missing from education and health planning for children with SEND.

Many early years and school food projects focus on what is on the plate, not on whether children can cope with, learn about and safely eat that food.

For children with SEND, feeding differences can:

- Limit nutrition and physical health
- Reduce participation in learning, trips and social times, including lunch and after-school clubs
- Affect emotional wellbeing, anxiety and self-esteem
- Increase stress for families and school staff
- Lead to higher long-term system costs

This means many children are in school but not fully accessing learning, enrichment or social opportunities because food and eating remain a barrier.



Why this gap exists

Feeding development sits between systems and **often falls through the cracks.**

- Health services focus on diagnosis and clinical treatment.
- Education focuses on curriculum, progress and outcomes.
- School food policy focuses on provision, menus and nutrition standards.

No system takes clear ownership of feeding as a developmental and educational skill. Statutory services are often:

- **Reactive**, responding when difficulties are severe.
- **Resource-constrained** and threshold-driven.
- Focused on the most **complex, high-risk cases**.

This leaves a large group of children with medical and SEND needs, without accessible support while difficulties escalate in school, at home and in the community.



Our mission

The Children's F.E.D. Foundation is a development and education-first organisation that works alongside early years, special schools and healthcare providers.

We help families and professionals to build practical support for feeding development across early years, special schools and wider systems.

We:

- **Support systems change in education, health and community settings.**
- **Partner with early years, schools & colleges, focusing on practical support, staff confidence and family partnership.**



Why this matters now



National SEND reform, public health priorities and school food policy are moving towards earlier intervention, stronger mainstream and specialist provision, and improved inclusion. Feeding development is a missing piece that directly supports these priorities for SEND children by:

- Helping schools to reduce exclusions, restricted timetables and missed learning linked to feeding anxiety or mealtime distress.
- Supporting more independent, confident engagement with food, which underpins participation in the wider curriculum and preparation for adulthood.
- Giving schools a structured way to evidence proactive, preventative practice around health, wellbeing and sensory needs.

The difference we aim to make

By embedding feeding development within the culture, curriculum and daily routines of early years and schools, we aim to:

- Improve childrens' ability to engage safely and confidently with food, learning and school life.
- Increase independence and social inclusion for all pupils, including participation in lunch, snack times, trips and community visits.
- Support parents and carers to manage feeding challenges earlier and more consistently.
- Reduce escalation to intensive specialist services and avoidable long-term costs across education, health and social care.
- Ensure national food, health and education initiatives work for children with SEND, not only for the majority of children.

Our offer for early years & schools

The Foundation is moving from clinic to community, building national capability through four connected pillars that settings can plug into.

- **Equity and Access**
- **Education and Training**
- **Advocacy and Awareness**
- **Research and Evidence**



Equity and access

We are developing a digital platform to give schools, families and health practitioners easier access to evidence-based guidance and support.

For education & community settings this will provide:

- **Online training modules and resources** that can reach whole staff teams, including residential, mealtime and transport staff.
- **Signposting to “Experts at Hand”**
EaL-certified healthcare practitioners who understand developmental feeding differences, and can provide specialist support.



Education and training

We provide the Eating as Learning (EaL) Curriculum, an inclusive, practical approach to food education in nursery, school and college settings. This sits alongside our EaL Framework certification for healthcare professionals.

Social & emotional factors

Sleeping & toileting routine

Family routines & communication style

For education and community settings this means:

- Ready-to-use, developmentally informed activities that can be incorporated into early years, maths, science, PHSE, life skills and independence pathways.
- Approaches tailored for pupils with complex profiles, including high sensory sensitivity, anxiety, selective eating and medical complexity.
- Training and mentoring for teachers, therapists, TAs and lunchtime staff to work together around food and mealtimes in a consistent way.

Sensory processing

Fine motor & self-help skills

Seating posture & positioning



Advocacy and awareness

Shifting public understanding and policy to recognise feeding development as essential for food access, ensuring SEND children are not overlooked.

For education & community settings this includes:

- Language and concepts that help explain feeding differences and sensory needs to families, governors and commissioners.
- Resources that align with SEND, inclusion and behaviour policies, helping schools evidence reasonable adjustments and graduated responses around food and mealtimes.

Research and evidence

We are building the UK evidence base on feeding development and food education, grounded in lived experience and real school practice.

For education & community settings this offers:

- Opportunities to contribute to and benefit from emerging evidence on what works for SEND pupils in education settings.
- Practice-informed insights that can support improvement planning, Ofsted conversations and local area SEND inspection responses.

Our research

Our research shows that...



A third of children with feeding challenges suffer from **chronic reflux and/or constipation**

There is a high prevalence of **anxiety in children and young people with feeding challenges**: a consequence of the relentless challenge of struggling with something that they perceive as coming naturally to their peers.

Half of all children in our sample live with **neuro-developmental disabilities**, including **Autism**, which makes learning new skills a challenge.

Children with feeding challenges display a high prevalence of **sensory processing differences**



How we hope to work with settings

We are seeking partnerships with family hubs, early years, special schools, specialist settings and inclusion bases, to:

- Embed the Eating as Learning Framework and Curriculum within whole-school and whole-college approaches.
- Co-design and test practical tools, resources and pathways that reflect the realities of specialist provision.
- Mentor education, school nursing and therapy teams to ensure a more inclusive approach to children's learning, physical health and mental wellbeing.
- Grow a network of lived experience ambassadors and school-based youth champions who can influence local and national policy.



Children's F.E.D. Foundation

Feeding, Education & Development

Making feeding development recognised as a foundational part of every child's health, learning and participation journey, so no child is left unable to benefit from the food, education and social opportunities available to them.



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