

**Petition P-05-865 Guarantee fully plant-based options on every public sector menu to protect the rights of vegans and for our health, the environment and animals , Correspondence – Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council to Committee, 20.08.19**

In response to the correspondence from the Chair of the Petitions Committee, please find Blaenau Gwent School Meals Catering position.

In Blaenau Gwent School Meals Catering, we employ an NHS dietitian with experience of consultation, analysis and menu provision in schools. Whilst vegans do have the same protection in law as vegetarians/those with religious beliefs, and cannot be discriminated against, we are not aware that vegan school children are “often going hungry in public sector institutions” as we are not aware of any evidence to back up this statement. Furthermore a vegan option on all menus is neither legally required, nor practical, and where menu choices are already limited, can be to the detriment of others using that menu, Examples as follows:

**“Vegans have the same legal protections as people with religious beliefs”.**

We cater for vegans in all our schools in exactly the same manner as we do for those with religious beliefs. They are offered a daily vegan choice, as do our vegetarians who are offered a daily vegetarian choice, and those who choose not to eat beef or pork gelatine, they are offered a daily choice to suit through specifically tailored menus.

**“Service providers have an obligation to provide for vegans and to avoid any discrimination on the grounds of veganism”.** In providing a daily choice, and catering for vegans as we do those on other diets for religious, ethical and medical reasons, we do not discriminate.

**“Provision for vegans in the public sector is often lacking, with hospital patients, prisoners and school children often going hungry”.** We are not aware of this, we can provide a daily option for any of our pupils who would like this, in the same way as we cater for those with medical, religious needs etc.

**“We would like to see all Welsh public sector institutions providing at least one plant-based food option on every daily menu to ensure vegans’ rights are met”**

To comply with the law and to ensure there is no discrimination Blaenau Gwent School Meal Catering offer a daily vegan choice at meal times. This is provided by way of a separate menu for those who wish to eat vegan at both are primary and secondary schools.

There are good practical and legal reasons why vegans are catered for using a separate menu:

1. **Blaenau Gwent primary school menu consists of one daily hot choice**

which caters for the larger majority of school pupils. Pupils with religious, ethical, cultural and medical needs are catered for fully using alternative menus produced. Whilst vegetarianism and veganism is becoming more popular, they are still far from being the most popular choice. We currently cater for vegetarians and other special dietary requirements in our primary schools, in addition to many pupils who do not eat pork, beef or beef gelatine for cultural, ethical or religious reasons.

We produce special menus changing twice yearly and cater for all religious/ethical or medical needs including pupils with allergies, multiple allergies and complex medical conditions. A request for a vegan menu and have only received one to date has been treated no differently to any other request and a separate menu has been provided for that child. However like every other request it does not mean that this lifestyle choice should become the one hot choice of the day, similarly the one hot choice of the day will not be made Halal, or Kosher, or pescatarian or vegetarian etc. as these are still not the most popular choices in our primary schools for the large majority of pupils.

2. **Blaenau Gwent Primaries** – As with all schools in Wales, primaries must provide menus that comply with the Healthy Eating in Schools (Nutritional Standards and Requirements) (Wales) Regulations 2013. In addition to compliance with food standards, the standard menu is analysed to ensure that 13 nutrients and energy are within range to ensure pupils can receive 1/3 of their daily requirements from this meal. These regulations would prevent the one hot choice being vegan – we are obliged to offer fish once a week, oily fish twice in every 4 weeks and meat cuts on at least 2 days each week on our standard menu.

3. **Blaenau Gwent Comprehensives** – there are no figures for the numbers of vegetarian and vegan pupils we cater for as there are **2 hot choices daily – one of which is always vegetarian**, on the standard menu. Therefore, vegetarians are catered for daily using the standard menu and figures of pupils who are vegetarian are not kept. In Comprehensives, pupils with special dietary requests (other than vegetarian) are advised to make these known to the cook, and the cook on site advises on what options are suitable, and where required, will buy in ingredients/foods not routinely offered to ensure the pupils have a suitable (and liked) choice. For example, cooks have ordered in pizza bases and rolls for children requiring a gluten free diet. Where pupils are not confident to speak to the cook directly, we ask parents to contact our dietitian who takes this up

on their behalf. If a request for a daily vegan option is received, this will, of course, be provided, in the same manner as we provide for pupils who follow other alternative diets for religious, cultural, ethical or medical reasons.

Kind regards,