

# Coonabarabran High canteen serves up breakfast to hungry students!

There's no disputing the importance of breakfast, which has been widely recognised by dietitians and health professionals for decades as the most important meal of the day.

Research published in the American Dietetic Association Journal has found children who eat breakfast consume more vitamins, minerals and dietary fibre, and less cholesterol and fat than those who skip it.

Breakfast is also considered to optimise nutritional intake, which means kids who miss out suffer from lower levels of nutrients during the day – this can increase hunger and lead to the consumption of higher fat, convenience foods. Hungry school children are also known to have higher levels of aggression and hyperactivity, and less capacity to concentrate and learn.

Despite this, one in every four Australian children still skip breakfast, according to the NSW Government's Healthy Kids website. Often it's because parents don't have time to sit their kids down to eat before they go off to work;

because the kids don't have an appetite early in the day; or as a means of saving money on food.

As awareness of this concern grows across schools and the wider community, school canteens are increasingly being asked to step in and provide some kind of breakfast program for students.

One example is Coonabarabran High School in NSW's central west, whose canteen has followed the NSW Fresh Tastes Strategy since 2007 and now serves breakfast from 8.15 until roll call at 9am.

Canteen Supervisor Julie McGlashan says the main items are egg and bacon



muffins, raisin toast and crumpets during winter. “I’ve been here for five years and the muffins were being served when I arrived – the toast was added the year I started,” Julie recalls. “We try to keep the price affordable and reasonable – two slices for a dollar – and we also do hot and cold milos, and also offer breakfast juices.

“Egg and bacon muffins are popular for the kids and easy for us because they’re simple to make – we only use low-fat bacon and it’s not fried in fat, we only use a light spray-on oil, and it’s a substantial feed.

“We’re also thinking about offering cereals, but the issue there is that kids would much prefer to buy something they can take away to eat, not a meal that they have to sit down and consume from a bowl.”

Julie is supported by two fulltime paid staff – “there was only myself when I started out, but the canteen got busier and busier. We do quite well with volunteers out here, I think we have a higher success rate than a lot of the city schools, and we also get the school prefects to help out. We have a really fun time with them –



they’re good kids and as payment for working here, they get to choose something for recess or lunch. It works very well because they build up a rapport with the kids they’re serving. So we tend to have three adults and three

prefects all working in the canteen together at any one time.”

Julie adds that when the canteen adopted the Fresh Tastes Strategy in 2007, the school’s Stu-



dent Representative Council conducted a student survey to determine which healthy foods should be offered.

“It’s hard when you do a survey, because many kids will only say what they want, which isn’t necessarily a healthier choice. But I must say, since we brought in the healthier foods we’ve been making a healthy profit each year, whereas prior to that we were running at a loss.

“Of course they also enjoy their ‘red’ days, which is when you sell the more indulgent foods – usually we tie these in with an event in the local community. We do a special canteen for Christmas and another at Halloween, when the staff get dressed up in crazy masks and costumes. We try to make it a big festive day, which is really good fun for the kids.”

Julie adds: “The kids do surprise me constantly – the older they get, the more health-conscious

they become, especially when they’re involved in sporting and fitness activities. The healthier items, like salads, watermelon pieces in summer, are the ones that sell out before the other stuff.

“We bake our own baguettes fresh each day and offer them with a good choice of fillings, and they’re always snapped up too. It’s really good to see this change in the kids, they’ve become very accepting of healthier foods. When you explain the concept to them, they adapt to it and get on with it.”