

Free recipe book for pupils starts real meal revolution

- _. [Maev Kennedy](#)
- _. [The Guardian](#), Friday September 12 2008
- _. [Article history](#)

Fergus Mason, 11, attempts to cook spaghetti bolognese from a cookbook aimed at 11 year olds. Photograph: Graeme Robertson

The nation's 11-year-olds are to take up their wooden spoons, tie on their aprons and come to the rescue of the English dinner table, too often these days heralded by the ping of the microwave tackling the ready meal.

Any household without an 11-year-old should borrow one immediately to benefit from recipes for roast chicken, lamb rogan josh, mushroom risotto and summer pudding. Every boy and girl in England is entitled to a free cookery book containing the 32 recipes voted for by the public as "real meals" - fresh ingredients, proper cooking and not a tin of onions or a plastic bag of frozen breadcrumbs in sight.

"Too many people just accept they cannot cook or simply do not have time for it," the schools secretary, Ed Balls, said yesterday. "We've lost touch with making basic dishes from scratch, even though there has never been a wider range of food in our shops. Schools are only part of the solution - at the end of the day parents bring up children, not teachers."

The Real Meals booklet comes with a foreword by the celebrity chef Phil Vickery, who says: "Cooking is a skill and often it is not learned at an early enough age. Once you can cook the basics, you will have the best survival tool in the box to take you into adult life."

Balls hinted that as a child he was no slouch in the kitchen himself: "It will be great if young people have the chance to make healthy dishes from basic ingredients at home, not simply in the classroom - as I did when I was growing up."

The recipe book, which can be downloaded from the [teachernet](#) website or is available in printed form if headteachers apply to the schools department, comes in advance of the introduction of compulsory cooking lessons for all 11- to 14-year-olds by 2011. The government also announced yesterday that £151m would be spent on "food technology areas" in schools.

When the introduction of compulsory cooking was announced, teachers' representatives warned that one in seven schools would be unable to comply, since they had neither the space, the equipment nor the staff qualified to teach even basic cookery skills. The government has also promised to help with the cost of ingredients for poorer children.

According to the Department for Children, Schools and Families, about 85% of secondary schools offer some form of food technology lessons, but critics have said this often amounts to designing food packaging or arranging toppings on a pizza to look pretty.

On the menu

The recipes in Real Meals include

Apple crumble, beef and veggie stew, beef curry, cheese sauce, chicken casserole, chicken pasta salad, chicken tikka, chilli con carne, chow mein, coleslaw, cottage pie, crispy potatoes, custard, fajitas, fruit pie, hotpot, lamb rogan josh, leek and potato soup, minestrone, mushroom, risotto, paella, ragu, roast chicken legs, savoury rice, sizzling stir-fry, spaghetti bolognese, speedy potato salad, spicy tomato soup, summer pudding, vegetable curry, vegetables, vegetarian lasagne.