

Dietician addresses lack of healthy vegetable education in intermediate schools

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A Massey University dietitian is concerned at the lack of skills taught to intermediate school children about creating and cooking simple meals using vegetables.

Only 13 per cent of surveyed teachers identified planning and preparing a complete meal as a key learning objective for their students, according to new research by dietetic masters students on public health nutrition placement with the Heart Foundation and vegetables.co.nz in September last year.

Nearly 120 schools throughout New Zealand participated in the research, which examined how intermediate school [children](#) are currently taught cooking skills. Overall, the findings indicate there are opportunities to better support children with key skills in food preparation.

Of those surveyed, only 10 per cent of teachers listed the fruit and [vegetable](#) content of a recipe as a factor that influenced their recipe choice. Many of the foods and techniques taught in class were based around cakes, muffins and desserts, with less than 50 per cent of the foods prepared as main meals.

Associate Professor Carol Wham, domain leader for public health nutrition, says while some schools are doing very well, there were major discrepancies in the [survey results](#).

"Developing the ability to prepare a simple healthy meal will empower

children and their families to access and enjoy [nutritious meals](#) within their own budgetary, cultural, social and time constraints. Undoubtedly the school curriculum is an invaluable place to teach and develop these skills, as it reaches all children and provides cross-curricular learning.

"While the current curriculum allows this to occur, sadly what we discovered is that large differences in teachers' time, budgets, resources and messaging mean the life skills being taught vary dramatically from school to [school](#)," Dr Wham says.

As a result of the findings, the Heart Foundation and [vegetables.co.nz](#) will now work with other key agencies, including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Association of Intermediate and Middle Schools, and the Home Economics and Technology Teachers' Association to develop steps to strengthen what is taught in schools.

Provided by Massey University

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