



# City Research Online

## City St George's, University of London

**Citation:** Morgan, S., Paton, V. & Harding, C. (2019). Participation in the school dinner hall environment: A qualitative observational study of a UK mainstream primary school

This is the published version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

**Permanent repository link:** <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/22217/>

**Copyright and Reuse:** Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to [City Research Online policy](#).

# School dinner halls: Too noisy to participate?



Sally Morgan, Vicky Paton, Celia Harding  
[Sally.morgan@city.ac.uk](mailto:Sally.morgan@city.ac.uk) @sallymorganslt  
City, University of London

[www.city.ac.uk](http://www.city.ac.uk)

## Introduction

All children should have equal access to participate within school.

Participation is affected by contextual factors; the physical environment and people. One important aspect is the daily school meal.

Little is known about UK school dinner environments and there is limited formal guidance.

## Purpose

Pilot study of one English primary school to:

- explore a dinner hall environment
- identify suitable parameters to audit the physical and social environment
- determine if the environment supports communication and, if not, can improvement recommendations be made

## Methods

One multicultural inner city primary school participant.

Two one hour lunchtime sessions observed:

- Children, aged 5-11 years, (703)
- Mealtime staff (30).

Observations and information gathered through:

- Use of adapted published classroom environment audit tools:
  - How acoustically friendly is your listening environment?<sup>1</sup>
  - Sensory Audit for schools & classrooms<sup>2</sup>
- Sound pressure level measurements

## References

1. Worcestershire County Council & Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust (2015) How acoustically friendly is your listening environment?: <http://www.hacw.nhs.uk/EasySiteWeb/getresource.axd?AssetID=96865&servicetype=Attachment>
2. Attfield, Fowler & Jones Sensory audit for schools and classrooms Autism Education Trust : <http://www.aetraininghubs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/37.1-Sensory-audit-tool-for-environments.pdf>
4. Department for Education (2015) Acoustic design for schools: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/400784/BB93\\_February\\_2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/400784/BB93_February_2015.pdf)



## Results

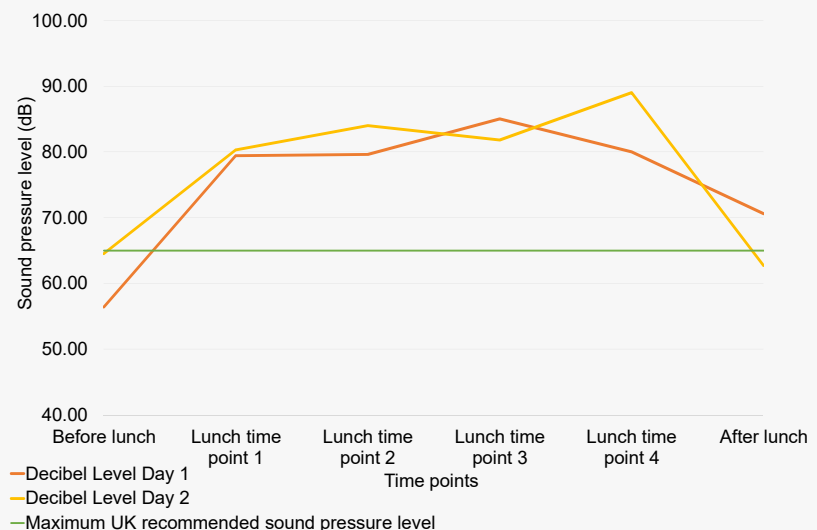
### Suitable parameters for audit?

Current tools suitable parameters with **minimal adaptation**:

- How acoustically friendly is your listening environment: 4 changes made e.g. Drapes on display tables -> Wipeable tablecloths on tables
- Sensory audit – all sections relevant except one 'Writing' – could be adapted to reflect on cutlery use

### Communicatively supportive environment?

#### Dinner Hall Equivalent Sound Pressure Levels



### Improvement recommendations possible?

Acoustically friendly audit score:

**Positive factors = 5**

**Negative factors = 9**

e.g. no blinds or curtains on windows  
hard floor surface with worn rubber chair leg tips

The school was a **willing participant**. School staff were keen to hear the **findings** in order to **improve** this **environment**.

Tools led to **improvement recommendations**.

## Conclusions

This exploratory study in one English school demonstrates that the dinner hall is noisy breaching UK government standards<sup>3</sup>.

This is not conducive to participation and communication for all children, and particularly impacts children with disabilities related to hearing impairment or auditory sensitivity.

The tools guided recommendations to reduce noise levels.

The acceptability of this study and the usefulness of these adapted tools supports planned further research with a larger sample of school participants.

CONTACT:  
Sally Morgan  
City, University of London  
School of Health Sciences  
Northampton Square  
London EC1V 0HB