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*The Guardian*

## **Big Divide on School Meals Revealed in Spending Survey**

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Seventy-five per cent of primary schools in England are spending less than 50p on food for a school meal - but what each child receives amounts to a postcode lottery.

Schools at the bottom of a new school meal league table, compiled by the Soil Association and published by the Guardian today, have less than 40p allocated to ingredients for dinners, while those at the top get up to 70p.

The figures, supplied by local education authorities, show the extent of decline in school meals services as Labour tries to reassure parents concerned about standards following chef Jamie Oliver's TV series.

Local education authorities for Rotherham, Greenwich, Redcar and Cleveland, Birmingham and Stockton-on-Tees all spend less than 40p per child for a meal, while the affluent London boroughs of Kensington and Chelsea and Wandsworth come top with spending of 65p and 70p respectively.

The number of children taking school meals in some authorities has fallen to less than a third, and several LEAs no longer provide a hot meals service. Some of the poorest London boroughs are among those where schools have to organise their own provision.

Peter Melchett, the Soil Association's policy director, said: "There are two vital things missing in education secretary Ruth Kelly's recent announcement on school meals - the introduction of baseline nutritional standards for school meals and increased funding to pay for decent ingredients and for extra hours in the kitchen. At the moment, Ruth Kelly does not plan to do anything about nutritional standards for primary school meals until September 2006. She must act now, not in a year and a half."