

Cookery lessons for every child, pledges Cameron



Three of the 13 winners of the Anne Frank Trust letter-writing competition at No 10: Nia Moseley-Roberts, from Cardiff, Orli Vogt-Vincent, from London, & Oliver Bacon, from Isle of Wight.
Times photographer Paul Rogers

Rosemary Bennett Social Affairs Correspondent
Last updated at 12:01AM, **July 26 2013**

Children should be taught about nutrition and how to cook at school to prepare them for a life of healthy eating, according to David Cameron.

The Prime Minister said that as a father of three he took a personal interest in how young people could be “fitter and healthier”. Giving them the ability to cook and make informed choices on what to eat was key to improving the nation’s diet.

His call for the return of old-fashioned home economics in schools came in a response to the winners of a letter-writing competition for 13-year-olds run by the Anne Frank Trust.

Bella, the author of the one of 13 winning letters, contrasted the healthy eating she witnessed in Italy with Britain, where some of her peers did not even have a table at home to eat from. School food in Italy was based on fresh fruit, vegetables and meat, and far healthier than the “pizza and chips” on the menu most days at her school, she wrote.

Mr Cameron said that tougher standards were being introduced next year to improve the quality of school dinners, but he wanted to go farther with lessons on healthy eating.

“Above all, we need to teach children about food, as well as how to cook. We want to keep on improving in this area, so I am sure that the Education Secretary will be delighted to read your thoughts,” he said.

The Prime Minister's support for home economics comes weeks after Michael Gove, the Education Secretary, issued a new national curriculum for schools. After an argument with business leaders, who complained his new Design and Technology curriculum was too focused on "lifestyle" because of the inclusion of subjects such as cookery, it was toughened up with the more high-tech design and robotics added.

But officials said it was not at the expense of cooking, which becomes compulsory for the first time.

Latest figures show that 23 per cent of children aged under 15 are overweight and 16 per cent are obese.

In her letter, Bella also criticised the sporadic approach to sport in schools, where some weeks have no physical activity at all on the timetable.

In his reply to the 13 winners, Mr Cameron also revealed that he was concerned about the plight of rough sleepers and the suffering of those with dementia and their families.

"You talked about the need to do more on dementia. And believe me, this is something I'm really worried about too. This is a terrible disease which causes huge suffering to hundreds of thousands of people across Britain, not to mention their family and friends who deal with the consequences," he said.

Other winning letters included a call for the legalisation of assisted suicide, for a crackdown on excessive packaging of products and for Scrabble to be on the curriculum. There were complaints about "stick thin" girls in advertisements, poorly qualified teachers, large class sizes and over-testing in schools that was driving out creativity.

Orli, another winner, wrote: "It's impossible to remember writing a story in school just because you actually want to, without a criteria of what you need to include to get the right levels. I can't enjoy a subject any more without the fear that I'm not going to achieve my target, that I'm not on track, that I'm not prepared for the countless assessments we're bombarded with every month."

The Anne Frank Trust ran the competition to encourage 13-year-olds, which it says is often an overlooked group, to speak out about what was important to them. Anne Frank was 13 when she received the diary in which she gave a candid account of life as a Jewish teenager hidden away from the Nazis in Amsterdam during the Second World War.

For more winning letters visit annefrank.org.uk