

School one step ahead in kitchen

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HOW many people do you know in their twenties who confess to not being good in the kitchen?

Some would not know where to begin when making a dish as simple as spaghetti bolognese.

But last month, the Government, in a move aimed at combating childhood obesity, announced plans to introduce compulsory cooking for 11- to 14-year-olds.

From this September, every 11- to 14-year-old in the 85% of schools currently offering food technology classes will be taught practical cookery.

The remaining 15% of secondaries in England will be expected to teach the compulsory classes by 2011.

One Cobham school has been providing its pupils with this important piece of education since 2006.

Nathalie Ashbee, a trained

chef who has worked around the world, shares her knowledge with pupils at Feltonfleet in cookery classes once a week.

Mrs Ashbee explained: "I want to install happiness for cooking, not make it something children are terrified of or cannot do."

Her classes are voluntary for year 7 pupils, age 11-12, and take place after school. They are so popular she has a waiting list.

She works with fresh, raw ingredients, believing that young people should know where the food comes from.

She said: "I entrust them with a sharp knife and they need to know how to handle it sensibly. Some are a bit worried about cutting themselves. Once we get going, I show them how to cut things carefully.

"Cooking is a skill they will have for life, rather than just going to the supermarket, buying something and microwaving it. It is something they will never forget and a lot

of people get a lot of enjoyment from what they eat."

The classes have been such a success that some of the pupils were even allowed to help cook Christmas lunch at their homes.

Mrs Ashbee added: "A lot of parents think children in the kitchen means a mess. But we talk about clearing up as you go along."

Keen to see other schools follow suit, she said: "You don't need great amounts of equipment, you can manage with very little.

"It would be lovely to have a great big kitchen for dedicated cookery clubs. In reality, lots of schools cannot afford that.

"The more schools that do it, the more children enjoy it, the more parents will appreciate it."

When the children leave the class, Mrs Ashbee provides them with a recipe book containing all the dishes they have cooked and recommends a number of books and websites in the hope they will continue cooking.