

School's healthy foods leaves canteen all Shuk up

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The Shuk is no ordinary school canteen. At Bialik College's cafeteria, students feast on fresh salads, falafel, quinoa and soba noodles.

Or they may order mushroom burgers with pesto mayonnaise and chargrilled sweet potato and spinach.

Just over four years ago two mothers decided they were sick of the unhealthy fare the independent Jewish school's canteen was serving and helped revamped the eatery.

It was named The Shuk (Hebrew for market) and began focusing on freshly made, healthy foods.

Across Victoria, schools are offering healthy options and some are moving towards cafe-style settings with coffee machines.

State government canteen guidelines and the popularity of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program are also encouraging students to eat healthy foods in schools.



Bonnie So, Natalia Shostak and Debbie Poratt in the canteen at Bialik College. Photo: Simon Schluter

Bialik College canteen administrator Nat Shostak said before The Shuk opened she had wanted the school to focus on wholesome and delicious foods.

"Most canteens buy things in. Our philosophy was if you can make everything and it's tasty the kids will buy it," she said.

The Shuk has been a success, operating only to provide students and staff with healthy food. It breaks even financially.

Principal Jeremy Stowe-Lindner said the canteen attempted to capture the experience

of the "busy, colourful environment" of a Middle Eastern marketplace.

Students can create their own salads or sandwiches and order them online from a broad range of ingredients. The menu changes every term.

"When they pre-order they can decide whatever they want in their salad. They can decide whatever they want in their sandwiches. We can make things very much bespoke," Mr Stowe-Lindner said.

The zucchini slice at \$2.20 is among the most popular items. But The Shuk also offers a small range of sweet and savoury treats, which students can choose.

"If you prevent children from making choices then when they go into the outside world they can go a bit crazy. So you've got to expose them to some personal responsibility and personal choice."

The Shuk's chef Deb Poratt said children have become increasingly educated about healthy food. "Four years ago if I made a kale quinoa salad no one would have eaten it, whereas now they do," she said.

"Last term we had an eggplant schnitzel burger ... that went well."

Victorian School Canteen Association management committee member Sharon Grass said canteens had come a long way since the days when meat pies and sauce were staples, with a trend towards healthier choices. She said schools that were able to offer "wonderful and varied menus" often had strong support from parents.

However, Ms Grass said not all school canteens could offer a wide range of healthy "gourmet" foods with limited facilities.

She said students were now eating from canteens more often. "We have children across our schools now having food from the canteen every day," she said. "It goes from being a treat to being part of the regular diet."