

**Healthy
Eating
Policy
May 2024**

Whitechurch National School

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Rev'd. David Bowles

Principal

Ms. Sarah Richards

Deputy Principal

Ms Judy Brown

Healthy Eating Policy

Introductory Statement:

This Healthy Eating Policy was drawn up to review the existing policy in consultation with teachers, parents and pupils. It has since been reviewed to ensure it meets the current DE/ HSE requirements and in line with the DE Wellbeing Policy Statement Framework for practice 2018-2023. The Healthy Eating Policy Development Toolkit (HSE). The Deputy Principal in conjunction with the teaching staff, In School Management Team and Principal have reviewed and update the policy. The PTA and general parent body, along with the Student Council have been consulted and afforded opportunities to discuss the policy, its operation and to make suggestions.

Our school values the holistic development of the child and sees wellbeing as a crucial foundation for all learning, of which the Healthy Eating Policy plays a pivotal role.

It is school policy that healthy eating is encouraged by pursuing both **education** for pupils and **guidance** for parents/guardians. We approach this policy with the understanding that ultimately children's appetites and tastes differ and it is a parent's/guardian's responsibility to ensure that his/her child eats healthily at all times, including during school activities. As a primary school following the Department of Education prescribed curriculum, we are aware of our responsibility to encourage the children to implement the good practice that they have been taught across the curriculum in relation to healthy eating. To this end we have developed this Healthy Eating Policy and Guidelines for Parents and Guardians.

Studies have shown that children who eat a well-balanced lunch often do better in school and are more alert. As part of the Social, Personal and Health Education (S.P.H.E.) curriculum, we encourage the children to become more aware of the need for healthy food in their lunch boxes. In addition, the Physical Education curriculum supports the physical development and fitness of the children. The Science curriculum also looks at the development of the body, and deepens the children's understanding of how the body grows and develops.

Aims:

By having a healthy eating policy, we aim:

- ☺ To take a whole school approach to healthy eating in school, in relation to: the Culture and Environment, Curriculum (Teaching and Learning), Policy and Planning, Relationships and Partnerships.
- ☺ To promote healthy eating across school life, consistent with national healthy eating guidelines and school curriculum.
- ☺ To promote the health of the child and provide a foundation for healthy living in all its aspects.
- ☺ To ensure that food provision in school reflects the ethical and medical requirements of staff and pupils, e.g. religious, ethnic, vegetarian, medical and allergenic needs.
- ☺ To make the provision and consumption of food an enjoyable and safe experience.

Objectives:

The aims listed above are addressed through the following objectives, using the key areas of the Wellbeing Promotion process (Culture and Environment, Curriculum (teaching and learning), Policy & Planning and Relationships and Partnerships.)

Culture and Environment

Looks at Healthy Eating from a physical and social perspective.

- Packed lunches, availability of drinking water, where food is eaten (for staff and students).
- Time allowed for eating – balance of eating time and social time within DE allowed times.
- Promotion of non-food rewards.
- Culture of healthy eating encouraged and positive modelling by adults in school.

Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)

Covers what we learn about food.

- Aspects of Healthy Eating covered in the curriculum (e.g. SPHE, Science, P.E.) are the biological processes involved, the Food Pyramid, the role of nutrition in physical wellbeing and development etc.
- Resources used for teaching and communicating with parents include HSE publications such as Healthy Lunchbox leaflet, The Food Pyramid, NCCA Curriculum and supporting textbooks, Busy Bodies and other SPHE programmes.
- External agencies are utilised at times depending on availability. In the recent past, we have run the Food Dudes Programme (Dept. of Agriculture) and invited speakers to the school such as nutritionists/dieticians in line with the guidelines in DES Circular 0042/2018.

Policy and Planning

- The SPHE school plan includes the topic of healthy eating
- Ensure external meal providers adhere to healthy eating guidelines as per DES/ Department of Social Protection guidelines.

Staff are provided with opportunities for CPD in the area of Healthy Eating where it is made available by the DE/ HSE etc.

Relationships and Partnerships

Covers with whom schools work and communicate.

- Parents Teacher Association are a key partner.
- Communication with parents/staff on the healthy eating policy materials.
- External partners that support school curriculum – sporting partners such as the GAA, Leinster Cricket, Leinster Rugby, Playball, etc.
- After school activities in school such as swimming, hockey, Zumba, Mutlisport etc.

In Whitechurch National School two breaks are timetabled:

- ☺ A fifteen minute break at 10.30 am (Sos Beag)
- ☺ A thirty minute break at 12.20 pm (Am Lóin)

The pupils will be given five minutes, where possible, to sit at their desks and eat their lunches before going outside to play while teaching activities continue eg. oral language, story, music etc. Pupils can then bring out remaining food with them to the yard. All teachers will encourage the children to eat their lunch however, it is not possible to monitor each child's lunchbox closely. If a pupil is returning home with uneaten food, parents/ guardians are advised to chat to them and encourage them to eat their lunch in the time provided. Parents/ guardians may need to review the content of the lunchbox (children's tastes can change rapidly as they grow and amounts needed may also change), and if their child can manage their food independently. Some children may be assisted by lessening the preparation or packaging involved with their lunch eg. start to peel an orange, think about how much packaging is actually required in the lunchbox.

Drinks

To ensure good concentration, it is important for children to drink lots of water. Children should always have a bottle/ flask of water available to them. This may be refilled at the water fountain or other drinking water tap if it runs out during the school day. Parents should be aware that

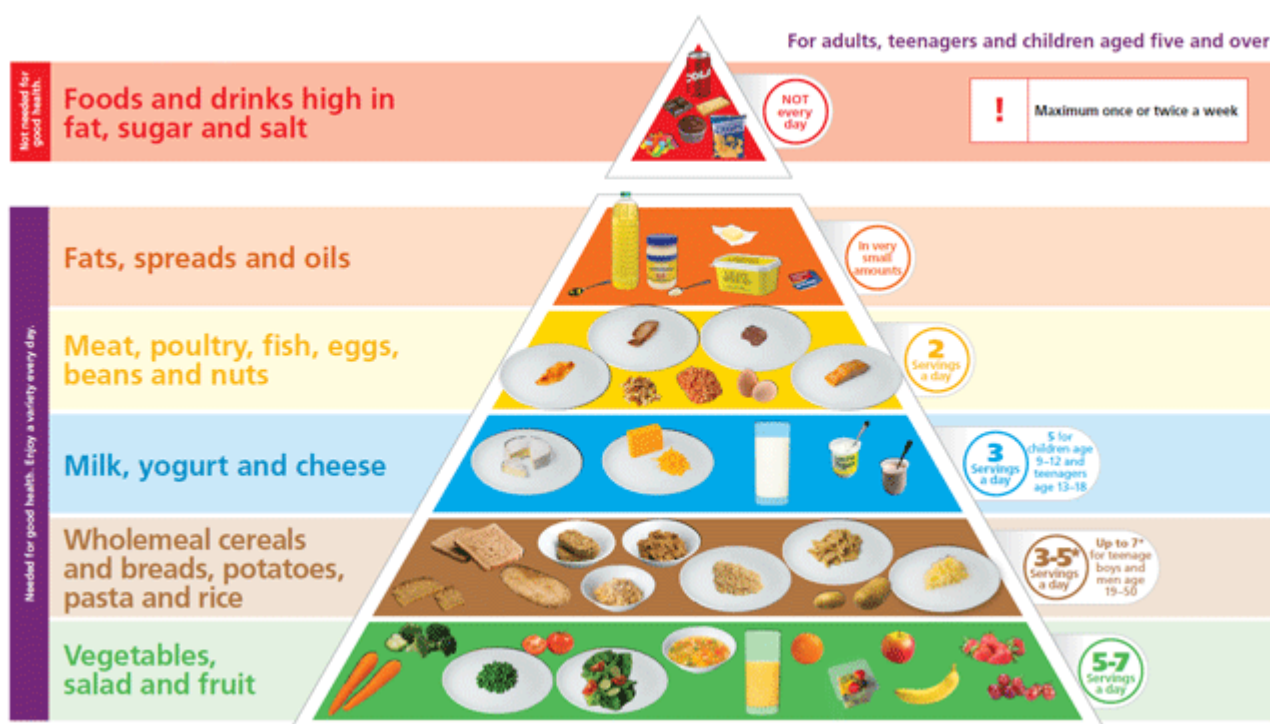
many fruit drinks and smoothies are high in sugar and may not be suitable in place of water alone. Fizzy drinks are never allowed as part of a school lunchbox.

All children are encouraged to eat balanced and proportionate meals at all times, including those meals eaten while in school. The food pyramid outlines an excellent common sense approach to healthy and balanced eating. All children's lunches should contain a majority of items from the three lower food groups. Foods selected from each level should be in decreasing amounts (starting from the bottom and progressing upwards).

The Food Pyramid

The Food Pyramid can be used as a guide for choosing the right foods in the right amount. For more information on the Food Pyramid and eating a healthy and balanced diet visit:

<https://www.safefood.eu/Healthy-Eating/What-is-a-balanced-diet/The-Food-Pyramid.aspx>



Treats on a Friday

While we would encourage lunchboxes that contain healthy food all week long, *one small treat* will be allowed on a Friday. It is up to each parent to decide what may constitute a 'treat' for their child. This treat does not necessarily need to be chocolate or crisps, it may be a special fruit treat or other healthy treat eg. mango and raspberries. Parents and pupils should be aware that it is not compulsory to have a treat in school on Fridays- by allowing one small treat on a Friday, the school is not saying that parents must send in a treat in their child's lunchbox- that final decision is still up to them. Recent feedback from the pupils show that they themselves believe

that we should work towards thinking that treats include some fruits that they especially like. We especially ask for parental cooperation with our policy on treats. It is not acceptable for any child to be given more than one treat on a Friday or any of the foods listed below Monday-Thursday. It is not fair on other families and pupils who do follow the rules. While we do not wish to be placed in the role of policing food, the school may contact a parent to request a meeting where unsuitable foods being sent into school are an issue.

The following foods will **NOT** be allowed in lunchboxes Monday to Thursday:

Sweets, crisps, chocolate, fizzy drink (never allowed) buns/ cakes, chocolate bars, biscuits.

On a Friday, **ONE** of the above will be allowed if the parent wishes.

Nuts

Due to a number of children with severe allergies that can prove life threatening, no nuts or other nut based foods such as peanut butter are allowed to be brought into school. Unfortunately, some children may end up sharing food without a teacher's knowledge even though this is not allowed. Although we cannot guarantee a totally nut free environment, we would ask for parental cooperation in this regard to ensure the health and safety of all pupils.

Guidelines for Healthy Lunches

Following consultation with the pupils, favourite lunches identified by them include a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, bread and crackers, pasta, rice and sandwich fillers.

What is a healthy lunch?

'Foods that provide fibre, vitamins, calcium.'

'Give you energy.'

'Makes you fit and energetic.'

'Helps you grow strong bones.'

'Helps you focus, concentrate.'

What might be in a healthy lunch?

'Apples, strawberries.'

'Sweetcorn, carrot sticks.'

'Yoghurt.'

'Sandwiches.'

'Smoothies.'

'Salad, fruit, vegetables.'

'Water.'

What should not be in a healthy lunch?

'Crisps.'

'Chocolate bars.'

'Jellies, lollipops.'

'Fizzy drinks'.

'Marshmallows'.

'Chocolate spread'.

What encourages you to eat your lunch?

'It's fast and easy to eat outside'

'Something I actually like'

'Different things each day- I hate the same thing every day'

'Time to eat quietly in class before going out to play'

What drinks could we include in a healthy lunch?

'Water is best'.

'Fresh fruit juice'.

'Smoothie'.

What drinks should not be allowed?

'Fizzy drinks'.
'Hot chocolate'.
'Milkshake'.
'Lucozade'.

Who should make sure we follow these guidelines?

'Us' (pupils).
'Teachers'.
'Parents'.

Any other comments?

'It is not fair if someone brings in junk food and we all follow the rules'
'It is not a kid's fault if there is junk in their lunchbox that their Mum or Dad has put in'
'I think I go hyper when I eat junk so I can't concentrate properly on maths'
'I like having a treat on Fridays- it makes the end of the week fun'

The following is a list of **suggested** foods for a healthy, balanced school lunch from Safefood, the HSE and Healthy Ireland. Please note these ideas are not exhaustive.

5-day lunchbox planner

We often end up putting the same things in the lunchbox everyday. Keeping lunchbox contents varied makes lunch more enjoyable. The following planner shows you some examples of snacks and lunch items.

Monday

1 medium wholemeal bread roll with tomato and cheese



+

Handful of carrot sticks

+

Pot of low-fat yoghurt

+



Tuesday

Small pitta bread with tuna and sweetcorn



+

1/2 wholemeal scone

+



+



Wednesday

2 tablespoons of pasta with 1 tablespoon of tomatoes and vegetables



+

2 crackers with low-fat cheddar cheese

+



+



Thursday

2 slices of wholemeal bread with cooked ham and lettuce

+

Slices of pepper, cucumber, sugar snap peas or mangetout

+



+

Yoghurt

+



Friday

Tortilla wrap with chicken, sliced peppers and lettuce



+

Small tub of stewed fruit

+

6 cherry tomatoes

+



Remember:

1. Use low-fat spread, low-fat mayonnaise or relish instead of full-fat options
2. Smaller portions for smaller children

Seven steps to creating healthy, varied and interesting lunchboxes

<https://www.safefood.eu/Publications/Consumer-info/Healthy-lunchboxes.aspx>

- ☺ Include a wide variety of foods - starchy foods, protein, dairy, and fruit and vegetables
- ☺ Try to offer different foods every day - no one wants to be eating a ham sandwich five days a week!
- ☺ Vary the types of bread e.g. pitta bread, bagels, wholemeal rolls - keep a stock in the freezer
- ☺ Cook extra rice/pasta in the evening - these can make interesting salads
- ☺ Theme your lunchbox on a different country, e.g. Italian - try a pasta salad, Mexican fill flour tortillas
- ☺ Home-made soup (in a Thermos flask) is great for cold days, while salads are light and refreshing for warmer weather. Both are packed with essential vitamins and minerals
- ☺ Fluids are important for children - up to 6 cups of fluid should be encouraged daily. Milk and water are the best options.

First Break/ Sos Beag:

All children will be given time to eat their lunch at their desks inside the classroom. Children should stay seated while eating their lunch and may not walk around the classroom. Children may take a small amount of lunch outdoors to eat. Younger children may be allowed some extra time to eat indoors before going out to play. This can be particularly important for Junior Infants in the first term who often eat more slowly.

Lunch Break/ Am Lóin:

All children will be given a short period of time to commence their lunch before going outside to the yard. Children should stay seated while eating their lunch and may not walk around the classroom. **Children should not exchange food** for health and safety reasons or save food to be eaten on the way home after school.

Storage of Lunchboxes:

Lunch boxes and drinks are stored in schoolbags for the day. Therefore, all containers should be sturdy, leak proof and easy to manage/ open/ close by children. On hot days

and following P.E. lessons or other physical activities individual teachers may allow pupils to have a drink when they return indoors. Drinking plenty of water is encouraged. In the winter months, (between Halloween and February mid-term holidays) children are permitted to bring warm soup to school in a flask. **It is not possible or safe to provide hot water in school for children to make instant soup.**

Packaging:

As a Green School, trying to actively reduce the amount of waste in school (particularly single use plastics), we ask that parents/guardians keep the amount of packaging in their child's lunchbox to an absolute minimum. We would greatly appreciate your co-operation with this matter. Reusable containers and wrappers and flasks are encouraged and are also more economical. All containers and flasks should be named. Waste wrapping/ packaging is taken home in lunchboxes for recycling/ disposal/ reuse at home.

Communication:

A copy of this Healthy Eating policy will be placed on the school website and all new parents will be directed to read it. Parents will be notified of the review and reminded where they can access the policy. Relevant information and procedures will be communicated to parents regularly.

Conclusion:

The teaching staff at Whitechurch National School greatly appreciates the support of parents in our efforts to implement this Healthy Eating Policy. The focus should be a positive one, with an emphasis on the benefits of eating healthily and setting up good habits early in a child's formative years.

Review and Implementation:

This Healthy Eating policy will be reviewed as necessary. This policy will take effect from May 2024.

This policy was adopted by the Board of Management on _____[date]

Signed: _____ Signed: _____

Chairperson of Board of Management Principal

Date: _____ Date: _____