

Merlin Woods Primary School Healthy Eating Policy

Introduction

As part of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Programme, we at Merlin Woods Primary School encourage our children to become more aware of the need for healthy food in their lunch boxes. What people eat is known to be a key factor influencing health. Research indicates a strong link between diet and performance. For example; a low sugar intake promotes concentration, lessens hyperactivity, protects teeth, and lessens the risk of diabetes. A low salt intake reduces the risk of heart disease in later life.

We believe that adults (staff, parents and carers) should be good role models and should support the children in understanding how balanced nutrition contributes to a person's health, happiness and general well-being.

The school is aware that the primary role model in children's healthy eating education lies with parents. We wish to build a positive and supportive relationship with the parents of children at our school through mutual understanding, trust and co-operation. In that way children will receive a consistent message about healthy eating both at home and at school. This policy has been developed by staff, parents and pupils of Merlin Woods Primary School.

Relationship to the Characteristic Spirit of the school

Merlin Woods Primary School seeks to help the children to grow and develop into healthy, confident, mature adults, capable of realising their full potential as human beings.

Developing a healthy attitude to food and helping children to develop good habits is seen as an important part of school life.

Aims of our Healthy Eating Policy

- To promote a whole school approach to healthy eating and nutrition
- To understand the benefit of a healthy well balanced diet
- To promote a positive attitude/relationship towards food and a balanced diet
- To develop an awareness that good eating habits formed in early childhood influence health and wellbeing throughout our lives
- To develop awareness of the importance of food for growth and development
- To explore food preferences in a balanced diet

Benefits of a good diet

- Ensures the development of healthy hair, skin, teeth, muscles and strong bones
- Provides energy and aids concentrate

- Strengthens the immune system

Curriculum and Educational Links

- The importance of balanced nutrition and healthy food choices is explicitly taught through the SPHE curriculum. Food and Nutrition is an important part of the Strand Unit: *Taking Care of My Body* at each class level and is taught each year. These themes are also dealt with in other subjects such as Science and Physical Education
- Children from 1st class are introduced to the food pyramid and its visual representation.
- Our school has participated in *Food Dudes* on three occasions, this is a programme encouraging children to try fruit and vegetables on a daily basis. This programme was very successful in engendering a positive attitude in the children to fruit and vegetables. The school is willing to participate in the programme or a similar one when it should become available to us again.
- As part of our environmental awareness programme and in keeping with our Green Schools status, lunches should be packed in reusable lunch boxes avoiding the use of tin foil, cling film and plastic bags. All packaging and uneaten food is to be taken home. It is important that parents check their child's lunch box to monitor what their child has eaten. It is essential that children come to school with a freshly packed lunch every day.

Your child's lunch box

Children get two ten minute snack breaks in the day along with two ten minute activity breaks. With this in mind it is essential that the food within a child's lunchbox can be eaten quickly and independently. Sandwiches should be appropriate in size and fruit should be chopped and peeled if necessary. Yogurts or any other food with packaging should be able to be opened by the child.

Suggestions for your child's school lunch:

- Breads – whole-grain breads, rolls, bagels, wraps, soda bread or pitta
- Bread substitutes – oatcakes, plain rice cakes, pancakes or crackers
- Fillings – cheese, tuna, hummus, cold meats, pate, egg, lettuce, spinach, cucumber, tomato, onion, peppers, coleslaw, salad, or banana
- Hot leftovers in a flask – curry, pasta (with or without sauce), soup/chowder, baked beans, rice, stew, lasagne or noodles
- Cold leftovers
- Fruit – apple, oranges, banana, grapes, pear, plum, peach, apricots, melon, grapefruit, pineapple, strawberries, raspberries, mango, blackberries or blueberries. Remember to peel and/or cut fruit and vegetables into bite-sized pieces for younger children

- Raw vegetables – tomatoes, sweet corn, peppers, carrot sticks, celery sticks, broccoli, cabbage or cucumber
- Dairy – milk, cheese, yogurts

For more detailed information on ideas for healthy school lunches please see Appendix 1 Safefood Irelands Healthy Lunchbox Leaflet. This leaflet can also be viewed on the following link <https://www.safefood.eu/Publications/Consumer-info/Healthy-lunchboxes.aspx> and is available in English, Irish and Polish.

Food items not permitted in school:

- Nuts (including peanut butter and chocolate spreads such as Nutella which contain nuts. This is due to severe allergies of some of our pupils)
- Fizzy drinks, sports drinks and drinks/juices with high sugar content
- Chewing gum
- Chocolate (including chocolate spread)
- Sweets & winders
- Crisps & popcorn
- Biscuits/cakes/muffins/traybakes (including homemade)
- Cereal Bars
- Take away or Deli counter foods such as burgers/ hot dogs/ chips/ wedges / hash browns/ fried chicken/sausage rolls/jambons/pastries (high in fat and salt content)

Any of the above items which are brought into school will be returned home in the child's schoolbag. In the case of unhealthy lunches repeatedly being brought to school by an individual child, the class teacher and/or school principal will request a meeting with the child's parents.

Drinks

It is important that children take in enough fluids during the day. Almost 2/3 of the body is made up of water. If children do not drink enough water, they may become dehydrated, thirsty, tired and weak. Studies have shown that children who are dehydrated are less able to concentrate properly. Therefore, we would recommend

that **every child bring a drink of water each day**. Children will have the opportunity to take a drink of water throughout the duration of the school day. There is a filtered water tap available to pupils to refill their bottles. It is recommended that children use re-sealable and re-usable bottles in line with our Green School status.

Recommended drinks

- Water
- Milk

Treat Days and Birthdays

On specific days throughout the school year children may bring in a treat or be given a treat by the class teacher, such days might include

- End of term
- Halloween
- School trips
- Very special occasions

Children will be informed by their class teacher what will be allowed on such days.

On birthdays we cannot facilitate the sending in of party bags, cakes or sweets. Handing these out takes up a lot of teaching and learning time throughout the year and can put pressure on other parents to supply sweets and treats on their child's birthday. **If you wish to mark your child's birthday please see their class teacher for advice.** Every child in the school is made to feel special on their birthday by the school community. School staff cannot be responsible for handing out party invites. Parents can do this in a subtle manner away from the school.

Roles and Responsibilities in implementing our policy:

Parents are responsible for providing a suitable healthy lunch for their children every day.

Children are encouraged to participate in making their own healthy school lunch.

Teachers will explicitly teach about healthy eating as part of the SPHE programme.

Principal and Board of Management will be responsible for communicating this policy to the school community.

The healthy eating policy will be reviewed every two years.

Ratified by BOM on 9th June 2020

To be reviewed in 2022.