



BALLYMENA ACADEMY

EST. 1828

Food in Schools Policy

Policy ratified by Board of Governors: June 2025
Date of next Review: June 2028

1. Introduction

This policy has been written to fulfil the requirements of the directive from DENI that all schools in Northern Ireland must have a Food in Schools Policy in place by September 2014.

A healthy school is one that is successful in helping pupils to do their best and build on their achievements. It is committed to ongoing improvement and development. It promotes physical and emotional health by providing accessible and relevant information and equipping pupils with the skills and attitudes to make informed decisions about their health. A healthy school understands the importance of investing in health to assist in the process of raising levels of pupil achievement and improving standards. It also recognises the need to provide a physical and social environment that is conducive to learning. To these ends Ballymena Academy is committed to being a healthy school by giving our pupils consistent messages about all aspects of health.

This policy demonstrates how Ballymena Academy is committed to raising awareness of healthy eating amongst all members of the school community and it should be read in the context of the other health related policies.

1.2 Rationale

- This policy will encourage, reflect and build upon the values outlined in the Northern Ireland Curriculum.
- Nutrition education is the key to support good dietary habits for health and well-being.
- A whole school approach can provide an environment which encourages positive attitudes to food and healthy behaviours in pupils to ensure life-long healthy eating habits are adopted.
- It is the policy of Ballymena Academy to comply with standards set by the Food Standards Agency and provide pupils with guidance in their learning programmes, which shall help them to make informed and healthy choices about their diet.
- We recognise the important connection between a healthy diet and a pupil's ability to learn effectively and achieve high standards in school.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

- Providing consistent, whole school, messages about food, nutrition, health and wellbeing.
- Complying fully with Nutritional Standards for school lunches & the Nutritional Standards for Other Food and Drink in Schools.
- Working with the Catering Manager to encourage students to make healthier choices.
- Providing education in the curriculum in relation to nutrition and healthy eating until the end of Key Stage 4.
- Providing education in Home Economics to all pupils at Key Stage 3.
- Enabling our pupils and all members of the school community to make healthy choices by ensuring they have access to a menu with a designated price list plus safe, tasty and nutritious food.
- Ensuring that all pupils and staff have access to an easily available supply of 'free', fresh drinking water during the school day.
- Promoting food provided by the school through breakfast and break theme days, competitive pricing and healthy eating campaigns.
- Ensuring that all the food provided by any member of the school community reaches the standard set by the Food Standards Agency.
- Providing a welcoming eating environment which encourages positive social and cultural interaction of pupils and teachers.
- Taking into account religious and cultural requirements, allergies and special dietary requirements, for example :- Gluten Free; Nut allergies; Eggs; Dairy etc.
- Ensuring that the views of pupils and parents/carers inform food policy and practice within the school.
- Providing training for staff in relation to healthy eating, and related matters, e.g. diet, food safety and hygiene.
- Being proactive in encouraging parents/guardians to provide healthy packed lunches.
- Taking steps to ensure that children who are entitled to free school meals avail of this entitlement and that anyone who may be eligible is encouraged to apply.
- Ensuring strategies adopted are fully inclusive of pupils entitled to free school meals.
- Keeping parents/guardians updated with relevant information using various media, e.g. correspondence from the Principal, the school website, social media etc.
- Providing the opportunity to extend food knowledge and skills beyond the curriculum e.g. The Young Environmentalists' Society gives pupils the opportunity to plant, sow, tend and harvest a range of fruits and vegetables at school and provides useful teaching and learning experiences for pupils.

1.4. Guidelines

Food in the Curriculum:

The subject of food provides many teaching and learning opportunities. The school curriculum can be used to enrich pupils' experience of food and healthy eating.

- Home Economics provides opportunities for pupils to understand the relationship between nutrition, food choice, diet and health, including opportunity to explore ways to develop a healthy diet and practical skills in the safe, healthy and creative use of foods and to plan, prepare, cook and serve a range of meals. Emphasis is placed on this through theory and the development of practical food skills.
- In Biology the constituents of a balanced diet are discussed with particular reference to the incidence of coronary heart disease and stroke. The biological significance of each component of a balanced diet is studied and the conditions which may be suffered as a result of deficiency are highlighted. The difference between malnutrition and starvation are discussed.
- Personal Development (LLW) provides opportunities for pupils to recognise the importance of a balanced diet as part of overall health and the whole person.
- Physical Education teachers and coaches give advice on optimal nutrition, focusing on good balanced eating and drinking practices, and recommend that pupils do not use protein supplements or nutritional ergogenic aids, in particular Creatine.

1.5 Breakfast, Break and School Lunches

Food served in School

Breakfast

- Ballymena Academy operates a breakfast service that provides nutritious food for pupils before the school day from 8:30 – 8:50am.

Morning Break

- Morning break plays an important role by providing access to healthy food choices.

School Lunches

- School meals are nutritious, varied, and appeal to pupils.

Snack Box

- After school the canteen provides access to healthy snacks for pupils staying for co-curricular activities.

Vending Machines

- Vending machines provide water only.

Requirements for Dining Hall and Sixth Form Centre Servery

- All the food sold meets the Nutritional Standards for School Meals. (Current standards are listed in Appendix 1)
- Food containing nuts are not permitted given that a number of pupils are allergic to this food.
- Drinks sold are consistent with the Government guidelines.
- The School provides guidance to parents based on the 'Food in Schools' recommendations as well as a menu and designated price list.
- The School Catering Team work safely and hygienically to ensure that all food provided in the Dining Hall adheres to Environmental Health Standards and they maintain their current hygiene rating status (5).

Food provided other than Breakfast, Break and School Lunches

- All food supplied in a classroom context should comply with the regulations set down by the Food Standards Agency (see Appendix 2) -
 - Food at all other Co-curricular activities
 - Class parties
 - Weekly coffee mornings/afternoons provided by teachers, where food is brought in by pupils or teachers
 - Rewards and prizes
 - Fundraising events
- Tuck Shops at school events, which take place outside the normal school day are permitted.
- Food provided at Prize Day and other related functions does not need to comply with the regulations as it is served to adults.
- Where an external organisation uses the school premises during the school day it should be made aware of the school's policy.

1.6 Other Issues

Lunchtime Management and Dining experience (Dining Hall)

- All pupils in the Junior and Middle school, together with the pupils in Sixth Form who wish to do so, consume their lunch in the Dining Hall. This is supervised by Dining Hall staff and teaching staff are also present.
- The Dining Hall is a pleasant and sociable environment providing the pupils with a biometric cashless cafeteria system, fair queuing and adequate seating. Menus and price lists are clearly visible. Contributions of pupil work from the Art Department are displayed and regularly updated to promote relevant food themes.
- Swipe 'n' Bite guidelines in the pupil learning organiser support an orderly environment to reinforce the importance of meal times and associated social norms.

Lunchtime Management and Dining experience (Sixth Form Centre)

- Most Sixth Form students consume their lunch on the Rec floor of Sixth Form Centre. This is supervised by the servery assistant and teaching staff are also present.
- The Sixth Form Centre Rec floor is a pleasant and sociable environment providing the students with a biometric cashless servery system and adequate, informal seating. Menus and price lists are clearly visible.

Pastoral Care

- Strategies are in place to address behaviour and other relevant issues linked around food and lunchtime activities.
- Through the Biometric system pupils can easily be identified if concerns arise e.g. eating disorders or inappropriate allocation of funds.
- Where necessary, relevant training is provided to enable staff to have an informed understanding of food issues.
- Uptake of free school meals is promoted and monitored.
- Where necessary, provision of food will support dietary requirements linked to personal health or religious practices.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Monitor in-house the food and drink available in school.
- Monitor and arrange appropriate training.
- Discuss issues relating to food and drink at Health and Wellbeing Committee meetings and School Council meetings, and act upon feedback wherever possible.
- Liaise with staff and parents/carers on nutritional matters within the school and act upon feedback wherever possible.

This policy will be kept under a 3-year review.

APPENDIX 1

Nutritional Standards for School Lunches

(Available on PHA Website)

APPENDIX 2

Nutritional Standards for Other Food and Drinks in Schools

Standard 1: Confectionery

No confectionery should be sold in schools.

Confectionery, chocolate and chocolate products include:

- Bars of milk, plain or white chocolate, chocolate flakes, buttons or chocolate filled eggs;
- Fresh or dried fruit that has been sugared or coated in yogurt or chocolate;
- Chocolate coated bars;
- Ice-cream (except at lunch time as part of a meal);
- Chocolate ices and other chocolate coated ice-cream;
- Chocolate coated or flavoured biscuits;
- Sweets, e.g. boiled or chewy sweets, gum, liquorice and mint. Also sherbet, fudge, marshmallows, toffee and chewing-gum. This includes sugar-free sweets and sugar-free chewing-gum;
- Cereal chewy bars, cereal crunchy bars, cereal cake bars and processed fruit bars.

Standard 2: Cakes and biscuits

No cakes and biscuits.

Cakes and biscuits must not be provided (except at lunch time as part of a meal).

Cakes include:

- Manufactured bought-in products and home-made tray bakes, cakes, biscuits and buns made in the school kitchen;
- Sponge cakes, Madeira cake, Swiss roll, fruit cake, banana loaf, apple cake, carrot cake, gateaux and American muffins;
- Pastries such as croissants, Danish, jam tarts and mince pies.

Biscuits include:

- All types of sweet varieties, e.g. Rich Tea, Digestive, Ginger Nuts, flapjacks, shortbread and wafers.

Savoury crackers and breadsticks can be provided, but they must be served with fruit or vegetables or a dairy food such as cheese.

Standard 3: Savoury snacks

No savoury snacks other than nuts* and seeds (without added salt or sugar) should be sold.

Savoury snacks include:

- Crisps or 'crisp like' products e.g. potato, corn and cereal snacks;
- Nuts, seed, fruit or vegetables with added salt, sugar or fat e.g. salted nuts, honey roasted nuts and fruit coated in sugar, chocolate or yogurt.

* Some pupils may have a severe allergic reaction to nuts.

It will be for individual schools to decide on whether or not to provide nuts.

Standard 4: Fruit and vegetables

A variety of fruit and vegetables should be available in all school food outlets. This could include fresh, frozen, tinned, dried* and juiced products.

Fruit and vegetables can include:

- All varieties of fresh fruit and vegetables;
- Fresh fruit salad;
- Fruit tinned in natural juice;
- Unsweetened fruit juice (100% fruit juice);
- Baked beans;
- Salad vegetables;
- Vegetable sticks.

* Remember dried fruit has a higher concentration of sugars. Therefore, in terms of dental health, it is not suitable as a snack between meals. It is best taken as part of a meal.

Standard 5: Water

Children and young people must have easy access at all times to free, fresh, preferably chilled water.

Standard 6: Drinks

The only drinks available should be:

- **Plain water (still or sparkling);**
- **Milk (semi-skimmed is the preferred choice in schools);**
- **Unsweetened fruit or vegetable juices;**
- **Yogurt or milk drinks (with less than 5% added sugar);**
- **Drinks made from combinations of the above (e.g. smoothies);**
- **Tea, coffee and low calorie hot chocolate*.**

Combination drinks must contain at least 50% milk, yogurt or fruit juice.

Artificial sweeteners are only permitted in combination drinks.

Consumption of high sugar energy drinks should be discouraged.

* Low calorie hot chocolate is defined as 20kcal/100mls.

Standard 7: Foods high in fat

This standard must be applied in three parts:

(a) Fried and other high fat foods are restricted across the whole school day and should not be offered in total more than twice a week.

In addition, bread-crumbed fillet of fish (oven baked) can be served once a week.

(b) Meat or chicken products are restricted across the whole school day and should only be

offered a maximum of once a week in primary schools and a maximum of twice a week in

post-primary schools

(c) There should be at least two days each week without any meat or chicken products, fried

foods, foods cooked in batter, breadcrumbs or foods containing pastry.

Fried and other high fat foods include:

- **Any food that is deep-fried either in the kitchen or in the manufacturing process even flash fried foods or foods brushed or sprayed with oil;**
- **Chips, roast potatoes, other fried potatoes, oven chips, potato waffles and potato shapes;**

- Garlic bread;
- Pastry dishes e.g. quiche, meat pies, fruit pies and vol-au-vents;
- Fried fish products

Meat and chicken products include:

- Burgers;
- Sausages, sausage meat and sausage products;
- Any shaped or coated meat product, e.g. chicken nuggets, escallops and goujons.

It is expected that foods covered by this standard will mainly be served at lunch time. However, if they are to be served at other times, e.g. at breakfast or break time the standard must be applied across the entire school week. For further guidance please see the standard for Fried and other high fat foods in Section 3 of this document's companion publication *Nutritional Standards for School Lunches*.

Standard 8: Red meat

Food choices or meals containing red meat must be served a minimum of twice a week and a maximum of three times a week in nursery and primary schools and a minimum of three times a week and a maximum of four times a week in post-primary schools. This standard applies across the whole school week.

- Red meat includes beef, pork and lamb and meals made from them.
- Red meat in sandwiches or paninis is not restricted by this standard outside of lunch time.

The only exception is bacon. Although bacon is classed as a red meat it should only be served as part of a main meal such as breakfast or lunch. Bacon will be required to comply with the standard for red meat. Bacon is not a suitable sandwich filling because of its high salt content.