



THE OLD BOROUGH NATIONAL SCHOOL

HEALTHY EATING POLICY

Introduction

This policy has been developed in consultation with staff, the Parents, and the BOM as a result of recent changes and developments, including HSE and Department of Education Guidelines and the introduction of the Hot Meals Scheme.

Overview

Over the last number of years, there has been a growing awareness and debate in society, and in particular in the media, concerning the role diet and exercise play in our physical and mental well-being. Health professionals have expressed serious concern over the rising number of health issues directly related to an imbalanced diet and lack of exercise.

As many of our attitudes to health and the influences on our lives are set in childhood, and research suggests that children's food consumption patterns are established in the early years, it is clearly important that any attempts to produce long-term improvements in the nation's diet should start with children.

In 2024, the Old Borough NS, applied for and was chosen to be part of the Free Hot School Meal Programme. After careful consideration, The Lunch Bag (www.thelunchbag.ie) was chosen as the school's provider, and the delivery of Hot School Meals commenced in April 2024. This policy has been updated to reflect these changes.

Rationale

Through this policy, the Old Borough NS aims to help all those involved in our school community to develop positive attitudes to food, to promote wellbeing and healthy living.

There will be a whole school approach, involving teachers, parents/guardians and children to ensure that healthy eating messages are a part of school life. A culture of healthy eating is encouraged and modelled by adults in school.

Vision

The Old Borough NS is sponsored by the Church of Ireland, the Archbishop of Dublin and Glendalough being its patron. As such, it will reflect the general ethos of all Church of Ireland schools. It aims to provide a caring, safe and healthy learning environment, where every child is encouraged and enabled to develop to their full and unique potential, as individuals, and as responsible members of their communities and society. We are also committed to promoting and protecting wellbeing (including physical, mental and emotional health) in our whole school community.

By having this healthy eating policy, our school hopes:

- To take a whole school approach to healthy eating in our school, involving teachers, parents/guardians, children and the wider school community.
- To promote healthy eating across school life, consistent with national healthy eating guidelines and school curriculum.
- 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 foster sustainable practices by encouraging the use of reusable containers, and discouraging the use of single-use plastics and packaging.
- To make the provision and consumption of food an enjoyable and safe experience.

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of this policy are:

1. To enable the child to appreciate the importance of good nutrition for growing, developing and staying healthy.
2. To enable the child to accept some personal responsibility for making wise food choices and adopting a healthy, balanced diet.
3. To ensure that the staff and children acknowledge and respect the ethical and religious food choices of others while also being mindful of allergies e.g. vegetarian, vegan, coeliac, halal etc.
4. To ensure pupils are well nourished at school and that every pupil has access to nutritious food and a safe, easily available water supply during the school day.
5. To work in partnership with families and professionals, and to encourage responsibility and accountability in parents/guardians in facilitating their children to develop healthy eating practices and encourage active living which will become embedded for life
6. To encourage and promote the recycling of lunch packaging, the reduction of waste food and the reuse of food containers and bottles/beakers.

Four Key Areas of Wellbeing Promotion

This policy has been compiled in consideration of the four key areas of the Wellbeing Promotion process:

1. Culture and Environment
2. Curriculum (teaching and learning)
3. Policy and Planning
4. Relationships and Partnerships

1. Culture and Environment

The Old Borough NS actively supports and fosters a school environment and culture that is conducive to promoting healthy eating choices. This culture of healthy eating is encouraged and positively modelled by adults in school.



NB: We are a Nut-free school. Therefore, nuts and nut-products are not permitted on the school premises or while the children are representing the school.

- **School lunches:** We are very fortunate to be able to provide every child in the school with a nutritious, hot lunch, from our Hot School Meals provider, the “The Lunch Bag”, free of charge under the The School Meals Programme operated by the Department of Social Protection. If they wish, the children have the option to opt out of the School Meals Programme, and to bring instead their own equivalent healthy lunch from home as outlined in this policy. We encourage all families to avail of the School Meals Programme and by doing so, they can rest assured that their child is receiving a healthy, well balanced meal every day. There is a great variety of food options available, with the flexibility also to change the choices on a regular basis. The School Meals programme delivers each child’s lunch, to their classroom, individually packaged in a compostable cardboard box. The children have also been provided with lunch boxes, in which all unfinished food and packaging, is to be brought home, for responsible disposal there.
- **Lunchtimes:** In our school, the children eat twice a day before going out to play in their classrooms. Children eat their own “snacks” provided from home just before the first break. The Hot School Meals are delivered to the classroom just before the main lunch break, for those who have not opted out of this option. Children are not allowed to swap lunches or share food utensils/drink containers.
- **Lunch boxes, utensils etc:** parents/guardians are asked to ensure that their child has a reusable water bottle, and if also required, a reusable lunch box/bag. As mentioned previously, our Hot School Meals provider, “The Lunch Bag” has also provided lunch boxes for bringing home the packaging and uneaten food. Parents/guardians should endeavour to ensure that their child can open/close and use their own lunch items, without assistance, where possible.
- **Drinking water:** We promote the consumption of water as much as possible. Children should bring in from home an adequate amount of water for the day, preferably in a reusable bottle. This bottle can be refilled throughout the day if necessary. Glass and cans are not suitable for health and safety reasons.
- **Sustainable practices:** The children must bring home their food waste and packaging for appropriate disposal and/or recycling. We also encourage the use of sustainable solutions (e.g. reusable containers, reusable beeswax food wrap) and discourage single-use plastic and packaging (e.g. tin foil and cling film)
- **Treats:** The school allows the children to bring in one small treat on Friday. Children are encouraged to make healthy choices and large treats, such as sharing size bars of chocolate/bags of crisps/etc. are discouraged. The children are also allowed to have treats in school for special occasions and events such as (but not limited to) end of term activities, special achievements or seasonal celebrations. On these occasions, treats may be baked/prepared in conjunction with the children, may be requested to be brought in from home, and/or may be provided by the teacher or Parent’s Association. We will always remind the children however that this is an “occasional” treat and not “every day food”.

We encourage the children to make healthy choices and to take responsibility for the choices they make.

2. Curriculum (Teaching and Learning)

We regard healthy eating education as a whole-school issue and we believe that opportunities to teach about the importance of living a healthy lifestyle occur throughout the curriculum.

- Healthy eating education forms an important part of our school’s curriculum. The importance of balanced nutrition, healthy food choices and food hygiene is explicitly taught through the curricular areas of Wellbeing (SPHE & PE) and STEM (especially Science > Living Things).

- Integration with other subjects is also encouraged e.g. reading nutritional labels as part of a maths activity; exploring where certain ingredients come from/are grown in geography; tracking the origin of certain foods, their introduction to Ireland and exploring cultural likes/dislikes of food and issues involving availability (e.g. famine) in history.
- We provide education on healthy eating in the broader context of healthy living, i.e. oral health, promoting daily activity, sports and an active lifestyle

3. Policy and Planning

- Yearly Planning: All teachers are required to plan for the academic year. Time is spent teaching the children each year about healthy eating, making educated choices, and developing a healthy lifestyle through diet and exercise.
- Policy Development: This policy has been developed, reviewed and will continue to be reviewed in the context of considering all other school policies relevant to wellbeing and health and safety.
- School Self Evaluation: This policy was reviewed following the commencement of the Hot School Meals Program and the introduction of 'The Lunch Bag' as the Hot School Meals provider.
- Continuing professional development: Staff will be encouraged to attend appropriate courses when available, and will be made aware of such courses (e.g. at staff meetings, via Aladdin and/or school email). Relevant speakers may be invited in to carry out a workshop/talk to the staff also.
- Planning of future developments: We will continue to consider the ability/willingness of our current Hot School Meals supplier to adhere to the healthy eating guidelines within this policy.

4. Relationships and Partnerships

The school is aware that the primary role model in children's healthy eating education lies with their parents/guardians. We wish to build a positive and supportive relationship with the parents/guardians of children at our school through mutual understanding, trust and cooperation. In promoting this objective, the school will:

- Inform parents/guardians about the school's healthy eating policy and practices (e.g. via Aladdin and the school website). The Parent's Association and all parents/guardians will also be reminded annually (at least) about the existence of this policy.
- Inform parents/guardians about best practices with regard to healthy eating so that the parents/guardians can support the key messages being given to children at school. Teachers are encouraged to regularly update parents/guardians on the content of the SPHE lessons being taught, including healthy eating.
- Facilitate parents/guardians and children to be involved in reviewing school policy and making modifications to it as necessary.

The school strongly encourages and advises parents/guardians to:

- Notify the class teacher in writing regarding any special dietary requirements or allergies that their child might have at the start of each school year.
- Facilitate healthy choices, for example to provide children with sugar free lunchboxes; to minimise "sweet treats" after school hours, etc.
- Promote active living e.g. encourage parents/guardians to walk their children to school, when and where it is safe to do so.

Other relationships and partnerships:

As well as with parents/guardians, The Old Borough NS is committed to promoting positive relationships among the whole school and wider community i.e. staff, children, families, community groups, other schools, sporting partners, local shops and businesses etc. We also strive to explore opportunities to promote the student voice e.g. student surveys, liaising with the Student Council, etc.

We will continue to endeavour to explore ways in which these relationships and partnerships can be utilised to promote healthy eating, healthy living and general wellbeing.

Outside agencies: In line with the guidelines in Department of Education and Skills Circular 0042/2018, the school has, and will continue to, engage with outside agencies and external supports, to promote the benefits of Healthy Eating e.g. HSE, Health Promoting Schools initiative, etc.

Implementation

Ensuring the effective implementation of this policy will require support, cooperation and commitment from four key stakeholders: the children, the parents/guardians, the staff and the school's management.

Roles and Responsibilities of Children

- To participate in preparing, making and/or choosing their own healthy school lunch as appropriate to their age and stage of development.
- To be mindful of sustainable choices in relation to packaging their lunches e.g. no tin foil, or cling film etc.
- To bring to school reusable (not single use) utensils for lunches if required e.g. teaspoon, fork, etc
- To eat their own lunch and to not share food or drinks with others. This is important particularly for students who suffer from allergies.
- To bring home any uneaten lunch and associated packaging and to support the school's environmental efforts e.g. by disposing of packaging and food waste in a responsible manner, as appropriate to their age and stage of development.

Roles and Responsibilities of parents/guardians:

- To notify the class teacher in writing regarding any special dietary requirements or allergies that their child might have at the start of each school year.
- To support their children to develop healthy eating practices and encourage active living which will become embedded for life.
- To provide healthy food choices for children generally, and for providing and encouraging the children to eat a healthy breakfast daily.
- To provide healthy snacks and/or lunch, in line with the guidelines of this policy and/or to select a balanced lunch online from our Hot School Meals Provider. (see also Appendix A - Healthy Lunch Options). If availing of the Hot School Meals, parents are encouraged to change the order regularly to keep the child engaged and to encourage them to try out new and different foods.
- To monitor and review the food being eaten and/or being brought home by their child, and to adjust their evening meal needs accordingly. Please note, that it is not recommended that these meals be reheated.
- To support the school in the implementation of this policy by ensuring that their children's lunches/snacks do not include any prohibited items. (see also Appendix B - Prohibited Foods and Drinks)
- To involve their child in preparing their healthy lunch/snacks and making positive choices (as appropriate to their age and stage of development)

- To provide reusable (not single use) utensils for lunches if required e.g. teaspoon, fork, etc
- To support the school's environmental efforts e.g. by disposing of packaging* and food waste in a responsible manner; encouraging the use of reusable containers and utensils, minimising the use of wrappers and single-use plastic and packaging (e.g. tin foil and cling film)
- To read food labels to become aware of sugar, fat and salt content in food.

* The boxes and forks provided with the hot school meals are fully compostable; these should be rinsed and disposed of in a composter or in a brown food waste bin, if either is available.

Roles and Responsibilities of Staff:

- To explicitly teach about the importance of balanced nutrition, healthy food choices and food hygiene as part of the curricular areas of Wellbeing (SPHE & PE) and STEM (especially Science > Living Things) and to be in accordance with the Whole School Curricular plans developed in those areas.
- To regularly update parents on the content of the SPHE lessons being taught, including healthy eating.
- To provide adequate time in which the children can eat their lunch.
- To encourage the children to bring healthy snacks/lunches (e.g. praise etc)
- To promote positive modelling and supportive attitudes to encourage healthy eating.
- To attend professional development as appropriate to update/train.

Roles and Responsibilities of the school management:

- To promote positive modelling and supportive attitudes to encourage healthy eating.
- To ensure that the lunches provided by our Hot School Meals provider are in line with the guidelines of this policy
- To share this policy with the school community, and remind them of the best practices with regard to healthy eating.
- To promote and facilitate initiatives which support this policy e.g. health promoting school initiative, Active School Flag, competitions e.g. Moo Crew competition, etc.
- To engage with outside agencies and external supports and, if appropriate, to invite relevant speakers to carry out a workshop/talk to the staff, parents and/or children.
- To encourage staff to attend courses when available, and to inform staff about such courses (e.g. staff meetings, through the school's digital communications).
- To monitor the implementation of this policy and to review it every three years or sooner if required.

Monitoring and Review

The effective implementation of this policy will be monitored by the staff of the school, principal, parents/guardians and the Board of Management on an ongoing basis.

Our hope is that every child will bring, and/or will order, a healthy lunch, but this may not happen. Staff are encouraged to monitor lunches.

If there appears to be a continuing disregard for the guidelines in this policy, parents/guardians may be contacted.

The school as a whole will focus on continuing to provide information about positive food choices and healthy living and continue to acknowledge healthy choices.

An initial review of this policy will be conducted after the first three years of ratification or as required in response to changes in practice, Department of Education policy or HSE guidelines.

Ratification and Communication

The final version of this policy was ratified by the Board of Management on 1st October 2025.

The school will share this policy on an on-going basis with all relevant parties: via the wider school community on the school website: www.ldboroughschool.ie; with the Parent's Association and all parents/guardians (e.g. via Aladdin). These relevant parties will also be reminded annually (at least) about the existence of this policy.

New students and staff joining the school will be made aware of this policy (e.g. student and staff welcome packs)

Reviewed

1st October 2025

Signed:

David Gillespie

Revd. Canon David Gillespie

Chairperson, Board of Management

Appendix A: Healthy Lunch Ideas for Parents/Guardians

The following guide is designed to help you provide quick, appetising, and nutritious lunches for your children. This list is not exhaustive but will provide you with some ideas.

For more ideas please also see:

- Healthy Eating for School children: <https://www.safefood.net/family-health/children>
- Safefood healthy lunchboxes leaflet: <https://www.safefood.net/getattachment/b8b00e34-4be7-4d8a-842a-4b80908c5b49/lunch-box-english.pdf?lang=en-IE>
- School lunchboxes: <https://www.safefood.net/family-health/school-lunchbox>
- 5-day lunchbox planner: <https://www.safefood.net/healthy-eating/lunchbox-planner>
- Suitable drinks for children: <https://www.safefood.net/family-health/sugary-drinks>

Breads: whole-grain breads, rolls, bagels, wraps, pitta

Bread substitutes: oatcakes, plain rice cakes or crackers

Fillings: cold meats, cheese, tuna, butter, hummus, pesto, egg, lettuce, spinach, cucumber, tomato, onion, peppers, salad, or banana

Cold leftovers: pasta (with or without sauce), rice (with or without sauce) stew, curry, lasagna, noodles

Fruit: apples, oranges, bananas, grapes, pears, plums, peaches, apricots, melon, grapefruit, pineapple, strawberries, raspberries, mango, blackberries or blueberries.

Vegetables: tomatoes, sweetcorn, peppers, carrot sticks, celery sticks, broccoli, cucumber

Yoghurt: Plain or fruit yoghurts only

Cheese: Grated cheese, cheese slices, strings, triangles, cubes.

Healthy Drinks: Milk and water are the best drinks for our teeth as we can drink them at any time during the day. Yoghurt Drinks or Actimel are permitted. Unsweetened pure fruit juice contains fruit acids, which attack teeth so they should only be taken with foods.

Appendix B: Prohibited Foods and Drinks

We strive to be a Nut-free school. Therefore, nuts and nut products are not permitted on the school premises or while the children are representing the school.



In addition, chewing gum is **not** permitted to be brought to school for consumption by the children.

We encourage children to make healthy choices. The children are allowed a **small** treat on Friday, which may include:

- Chocolate
- Small packet of sweets (not share bags).
- Crisps, popcorn, pretzels etc.
- Biscuits, cakes, muffins, cereal bars containing chocolate.

Children are only allowed to bring these items on Friday. If they continue to bring them during the week, they will be reminded by staff that they are not allowed. If this continues, the children's parents will be contacted.

Appendix C: Useful Links

Please explore the links below for some more information on nutrition and healthy lunch ideas.

<https://www.safefood.net/education/healthy-lunchboxes>

<https://www.bordbia.ie/nutrition/primary-school-children/>

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/70a2e4-the-food-pyramid/>

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/heal/healthyeating-guidelines/>

<https://www.healthpromotion.ie/publication/fullListing?category=Healthy+Eating&searchHSE=>

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/da7f19-eat-well/?referrer=/health-initiatives/heg/#healthy-eating-guidelines-for-kids>

Additional websites to support nutrition education

www.hse.ie/schoolswellbeing

www.healthyireland.ie/health-initiatives/heg/

The Irish Nutrition and Dietetics Institute www.indi.ie

The Irish Heart Foundation www.irishheart.ie

The Coeliac Society of Ireland www.coeliac.ie

The Irish Osteoporosis Society www.irishosteoporosis.ie

www.irishanaphylaxis.org

www.bodywhys.ie

www.hse.ie/healthyeating

