



*THE COMMONS NATIONAL SCHOOL
Killybegs
Co Donegal
Roll no: 16608 G*

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Healthy Eating Policy, Commons National School

Rationale:

Through these guidelines, The Commons NS aims to help all those involved in our school community to develop positive attitudes to food to promote wellbeing and healthy living. As part of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Programme at The Commons NS, we encourage the children to become more aware of the need for healthy food in their lunch boxes.

This policy was compiled by the school staff at the Commons NS. A review of our current food practices took place and this policy takes account of some general feedback and suggestions from staff, students and parents.

What we eat is known to be a key factor influencing health and wellbeing. The Commons NS is committed to facilitating the children's development of skills and attitudes to allow them to make informed decisions about their food intake. 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.

Aims:

- To promote a whole school approach to healthy eating and nutrition
- To understand the benefit of a healthy well-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

Objectives

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 for their school lunch in line with 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 encourage and promote the recycling of lunch packaging, the reduction of waste food and the reuse of food containers and bottles.

Culture and Environment:

School lunches: Here in The Commons NS we provide every child in the school with a nutritious, packed lunch, free of charge under The School Meals Programme operated by the Department of Social Protection. Parents have the option to opt out of the School Meals Programme if they so wish, and bring 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, you can rest assured that your child is receiving a healthy, well balanced meal every day. There is a great variety of food options available, and you have the flexibility to change the food choices on a regular basis.

Drinking water: Drinking water is available throughout our school. Children are asked to bring their own water bottle to school each day. This water bottle can be refilled by the class teacher throughout the day if necessary.

Food waste/recycling: The children must bring home their food waste and recycling. We place a big emphasis on recycling and limiting waste. The children will be encouraged to finish their lunch and then bring home any leftovers and wrappers. Due to the volume of waste/recycling, it is not possible for the school to provide bin facilities for every student on a daily basis.

Lunchtimes: In our school, the children eat twice a day before going out to play. To ensure good concentration throughout the day, it is important for the children to eat a healthy breakfast before coming to school. Children will be asked not to swap lunches or share food utensils/drink containers.

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 and healthy food choices is explicitly taught through the Science and SPHE curriculum. The Math Curriculum is also an avenue to explore healthy eating – e.g. label reading skills are math based! (Quantities, serving size, ingredients etc.) Additionally, Geography can provide opportunities to discuss where certain ingredients come from and what countries they are grown in. History can also be used to track the origin of certain foods, their introduction to Ireland and also explore cultural likes/dislikes of food and issues involving availability.

- All pupils have the opportunity to learn about food hygiene and safe food preparation and to learn about where food has come from. Pupils learn about the requirements for plant growth, the food chain and the components of a healthy diet through the Science curriculum. Through the SPHE curriculum, children will learn about food and nutrition as part of the strand unit; taking care of my body. In addition, the Physical Education programme supports the physical development and fitness levels of the children and the link that food and nutrition can play.

- The Commons NS engage in both **Incredible Edibles** and **Food Dudes** initiatives.

Special Treats:

We recognise that there is no such thing as “bad food” and we teach the children to enjoy treats in moderation. Special events in class such as end of term parties, special achievements or seasonal celebrations such as Halloween, Christmas and Easter are also times where food contributes to a sense of celebration, community and sharing. On these occasions, special treats may be provided by the teacher, baked/prepared in conjunction with the children and on occasion brought in from home. We will always remind the children however that this is an “occasional” treat and not “every day food”.

Implementation:

- The School Meals Programme is available for every child in the school to avail of.
- The menu can be changed regularly through an online portal at home (information available through the office) or by our secretary in the school. If the lunch menu is changed before 12pm any Thursday, the child will receive their new lunch the following Monday.
- For families who choose not to avail of the School Meals Programme, parents/guardians are responsible for providing a healthy school lunch for their child(ren).
- Children are encouraged to participate in making their own healthy school lunch.
- Teachers will explicitly teach about healthy eating as part of the SPHE curriculum.
- Teachers will monitor lunches on a daily basis. Teachers will ring parents if there is

continued unhealthy lunches or inappropriate treats. If the children bring food to school that is not allowed as outlined in this Healthy Eating Policy, it will be sent home.

- Teachers will keep in touch with parents regularly and inform them if any issues that arise relating to their child's lunch.
- Relevant speakers may be invited in to carry out a workshop/talk to parents/guardians throughout the school year.
- The effective implementation of this policy will be monitored by the staff of the school, the school principal and the Board of Management.

Staff development: Staff will be encouraged to attend courses when available, and will be made aware of such courses in staff meetings and through school email. Relevant speakers may be invited in to carry out a workshop/talk to the staff throughout the year also.

The role of Parents:

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 promoting this objective

The Commons NS will:

- Inform parents about the school healthy eating policy and practice
- Encourage parents to be involved in reviewing school policy and making modifications to it as necessary
- Inform parents about the best practice known with regard to healthy eating so that the parents can support the key messages being given to children at school.

Special Dietary Requirements:

Parents/guardians of children with special dietary requirements should make the school aware at the time of enrolment or when necessary.

Allergies:

In order to protect children who have serious food allergies, the whole school community will work together to implement age appropriate, responsible measures to minimise the risk of an allergic reaction. All children in the school will be made aware of the implications of food allergies and how they can assist in preventing allergic reactions.

If your child has a serious food allergy, as parents/guardians you must notify the school and provide a doctor's report stating the implications of the allergy and listing the foods to be avoided. You will be asked to participate with staff in formulating an individual allergy management plan. This plan will identify how best to minimise the risk of an allergic reaction for your child, taking her/his age and class into account. The individual allergy management plan may result in precautions or class specific restrictions, in addition to those of not sharing food or containers, being put in place. They are called class specific restrictions, as they will only apply to the class in which there is a child with a life-threatening allergy. Where class specific restrictions are required, the parents/guardians of all children in the affected class will be informed by a letter explaining what the restrictions are and the reasons for them. These will be regularly reviewed and updated, and any changes will be communicated in writing.

Healthy Lunch Ideas:

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.

- 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 in a flask/lunchbox – pasta (with or without sauce), rice (with or without sauce) stew, curry, lasagna, noodles.
- Fruit and vegetables – apples, oranges, bananas, grapes, pears, plums, peaches, apricots, melon, grapefruit, tomatoes, peppers, pineapple, strawberries, raspberries, mango, blackberries, blueberries, sweetcorn, carrot sticks, celery sticks, broccoli, cucumber.
- Yogurt – Plain or fruit yogurts only.

In order to ensure the successful implementation of this policy, the following food items are not permitted in The Commons NS as part of a healthy lunch:

- Chocolate (including chocolate spread), sweets, crisps, nuts (including peanut butter).
- Fizzy drinks, sports drinks, flavoured water, fruit juice.
- Biscuits, cakes, muffins, cereal bars containing chocolate/high sugar content.
- Yogurts with chocolate/biscuit balls or any sort of topping.
- Hot liquids/lunches in flasks are not recommended as they are a health and safety risk.
- Chewing Gum.

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.fooddudes.ie/>

<https://agriaware.ie/schools/primary-school-programs/incredible-edibles/>

Ratification and Communication: This school policy was ratified by the Board of Management in June 2023. It is available on the school website www.commonsns.com and will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Date of Review: May 2025

Signed: _____

Joe Cannon, School Principal

Chairperson of the Board of Management _____