



VIRGIN MARY GIRL'S NATIONAL SCHOOL

HEALTHY EATING POLICY

Rationale

Virgin Mary Girl's National School is committed to providing a healthy and safe environment for our students. We believe that a healthy diet is essential for good health and academic performance, and we recognise that parents, teachers, SNAs, students and the wider school community all play an important role in promoting healthy eating habits.

This policy supports healthy eating practices in Virgin Mary Girl's School by providing guidelines and strategies to promote healthy eating in our school. As part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Physical Education (PE), we encourage parents, teachers, and students to work together to achieve this goal through the promotion of healthy snacks and lunches and by enabling children to acquire the necessary skills and attitudes to make informed decisions about their food choices. A whole-school approach involving teachers, SNAs, parents, students and the wider community will ensure that healthy eating messages are integrated into every aspect of school life. Additionally, the children will receive consistent messages about healthy eating both at home and school. *This policy was developed in line with the guidance outlined in The Healthy Eating Policy Toolkit by the HSE.*

The Benefits of a Nutritious Diet

The advantages of a nutritious diet are numerous, including promoting the growth of healthy hair, skin, teeth, muscles, and bones, providing energy, enhancing concentration, and strengthening the immune system.

Policy Objectives

The objectives of our Healthy Eating Policy include:

- Promoting healthy eating and nutrition throughout the school.
- Recognising the advantages of a healthy and balanced diet.
- Raising awareness of the long-term impact of good eating habits established in early childhood on overall health and wellbeing.
- Emphasising the significance of food for growth and development.
- Exploring food preferences in the context of a balanced diet.



Curriculum/Education

There are many opportunities in the primary school curriculum for learning about the importance of living a healthy lifestyle. 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.

Meal Guidelines

We aim to provide healthy school meals that meet the nutritional needs of our students. We work with our catering provider 'Glanmore Foods' to ensure that meals include a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. Anything that is not eaten is brought home, so parents/guardians can see what has/has not been consumed. However, we also understand that ham being unavailable has become an issue for some. Therefore, a **PLAIN HAM SANDWICH** can be brought in from home to supplement the school lunch.

Only **PLAIN HAM SANDWICHES** are allowed as all other options are available on the school menu.

Breakfast

Breakfast is an essential meal that provides the energy required for children to focus and learn. Studies have demonstrated that eating breakfast can have both nutritional and behavioural benefits for children. Prior to the morning exercise break from 10.30 am to 10.40 am, children should consume easily digestible food, such as an oat bar, yogurt or a piece of fruit.



Lunch

At lunchtime, children have 10 minutes to eat. It is recommended that their lunches are varied and include two portions from the bread/cereal group, one portion of meat or a meat alternative, at least one portion from the fruit and vegetable group, and one portion from the dairy group. Water and milk are available for children to drink, as part of the school milk scheme. During teaching time, all water bottles will be in school bags away from all digital devices and workbooks. The rationale is to protect devices and minimise disruption during lessons. Between lesson transitions, children may be given permission to have some water. Water is readily available during lunchtimes.

Note: Students either take in their own lunch from home or they receive their Glanmore lunch. Any child bringing in their own lunch will be removed from the Glanmore system.

Special Treats

Occasionally throughout the school year, students will be allowed to have special treats on specific occasions such as end of term parties and school trips. Birthday treats/cakes are permitted, on the basis that they are appropriate to the class level. Birthday treats/cakes are to be small in line with the HSE dietary advice for children. Staff members will distribute these treats accordingly.

Rewards

Rewards in school will predominantly be in the form of golden time or stationery (rubbers, pencils, stickers, etc.) rather than food-based prizes e.g. sweets. On special occasions, whole class rewards such as movie and popcorn are permitted. We strive to have balance in our approaches. Allowances are made for special occasions in line with HSE guidance.

Food Items not Permitted in School

Food items that are not allowed in school include:

- nuts (including peanut butter)
- fizzy drinks, sports drinks, drinks or juices that contain high sugar content
- chewing gum



- chocolate (including chocolate spread)
- sweets and winders
- crisps
- biscuits
- cakes and muffins
- high sugar cereal bars
- deli food (sausage rolls, chicken fillet rolls, jambons etc.)

Note: Plain rolls/sandwiches similar to what is available on the Glanmore menu will be permitted.

Best Practice

It is best practice for students to start their day with a nutritious breakfast, consume small and regular meals instead of one large meal, engage in daily physical exercise to increase their appetite for healthy food, and substitute brown bread for white bread.

Allergies or Dietary Requirements

The school community is aware of the possibility of food allergies or dietary requirements within the school population, particularly nut allergies. Parents or carers of children who are on special diets for medical reasons, or who have allergies, will be asked to provide as much information as possible about which foods are suitable or foods which must be avoided. This information will be relayed to all staff. Children of different culture or religion's dietary preferences will be respected and catered for within this policy.

Roles and Responsibilities in Implementing our Policy:

Parents are responsible for providing or selecting 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.

Virgin Mary Girl's School will review our Healthy Eating Policy every two years.

The Board of Management will review this policy every second year.

Signed: _____ (Chairperson)

Signed: _____ (Principal)

Date: _____



Healthy Eating Policy-School Lunches Note

My daughter will bring in a PLAIN HAM SANDWICH every day (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.) She will receive her snack and water daily as usual.

I understand that she will no longer be getting a sandwich in her school lunch order.

Pupil's Name: _____

Signed (Parent/Guardian): _____

Useful Links with Ideas for Healthy Lunches: (these URLs may be subject to change)

www.indi.ie (Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute website) You will find a leaflet 'Are you packing a healthy lunch www.healthpromotion.ie

<https://www.safefood.net/family-health/healthy-lunch>

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/nutrition-fitness/breakfast-lunches/healthy-lunches>

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

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/hse-education-programme/training-and-resources-for-primary-school-teachers/healthy-eating-policy-development-toolkit-for-primary-schools.pdf>