



## **St. Patrick's Loreto PS Healthy Eating Policy**

### **Introduction**

The HSE booklet, Healthy Eating Policy Toolkit for Primary Schools, was used to assist in the review process. Our Healthy Eating Policy outlines how we as a school support healthy eating practices through the promotion of healthy snacks and healthy lunches, and how we help our pupils to gain a greater understanding of the importance of balanced nutrition. St. Patrick's Loreto Primary School is committed to facilitating our pupils' development of skills and attitudes to allow them to make informed decisions about their food intake. As a school, we believe that key adults in their lives, namely parents/guardians and school staff, should be good role models and support them in understanding how balanced nutrition contributes to a person's health, happiness and overall wellbeing. Our whole school approach to promoting healthy eating will actively involve teachers, parents/guardians and children to ensure that healthy eating messages are part of every aspect of school life.

### **Rationale:**

The Department of Education and Youth supports the view that good nutrition is central to a child's educational development, (Circular 0013/2016). Good nutrition is important as it impacts on children's physical and mental wellbeing now and in the future.

Healthy eating is an essential component of the overall health of children and as such is part of the holistic education that we advocate in our school. As a Health Promoting School (HPS), we strive to encourage a healthy lifestyle amongst our pupils. We can support pupils to develop an understanding of the nourishment of common and easily accessible food products, and to facilitate the development of the skills and attitudes to make informed decisions about their food intake, (Circular 0013/2016). Developing good eating habits, together with regular physical activity and a positive approach to mental health, will help us to live longer, healthier and more productive lives.

This healthy eating policy was developed following consultation with all members of the school community; including staff, management, pupils and parents/guardians. It forms part of our programme for a Health Promoting School (HPS), a component of the 'Healthy Ireland' agenda which is committed to supporting everyone's efforts to improve their health and wellbeing. This is also part of the World Health Organization's Global School Health Initiative, which seeks to mobilise and strengthen health promotion and food education activities at local, national and regional levels.



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The understanding of 'healthy eating' in this policy is based primarily on the Revised Food Pyramid (2017) as the key source of information on healthy eating messages from the Health Service Executive of Ireland (HSE).

### **Aims:**

The aims of our Healthy Eating Policy are:

- To promote a whole school approach to healthy eating and nutrition
- To understand the benefit of a healthy well-balanced diet based on the food pyramid
- To understand how good nutrition helps us grow, develop and stay healthy
- To develop an awareness that good eating habits formed in early childhood influence health and well-being throughout our lives
- To develop an awareness of the importance of drinking water for hydration
- To raise levels of concentration within class through the consumption of healthy food
- Additionally, we aim to protect the health and safety of pupils with serious food allergies

### **Guidelines: School actions which support our Healthy Eating Policy:**

**S.P.H.E.** The Social, Personal and Health Education programme is a planned programme which is consistently taught throughout our school. It provides opportunities to foster the personal development, health and well-being of the individual pupil. Under the Strand "Myself", there is a particular focus on:

- Health and Well-being
- Knowing about my body
- Food and nutrition
- Making choices

**The Food Pyramid** is an educational tool used nationally and internationally to communicate the healthy eating message. It will be used to teach children about the different food groups and nutrients in each group.

As a **Green School**, we aim to reduce the amount of waste we produce. We encourage parents/guardians to reduce the amount of packaging in lunchboxes. Every pupil is encouraged to bring home their lunch litter to maintain a clean and healthy school environment.



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**Be Well Week** is an event we often run. It focuses on the physical, mental and emotional health of our school community. Pupils may be surveyed on their healthy eating habits during this week. The surveys will provide us with insight into how healthy eating is going in our school.

**School Meals Scheme** Every pupil in St Patrick's Loreto has access to a hot school meal under the Department of Social Protection. Parents/Guardians opt in to this service. The external food provider for this programme is Carambola. Meals are prepared off site by the provider and delivered to the school hot. They are eaten in classrooms under the supervision of school staff. Parents/guardians and pupils can choose their lunch menu online. The lunch menus are set up to encourage variety. The school facilitates the operation of the programme as part of its commitment to pupil wellbeing and works in co-operation with the external provider to support its effective delivery.

All pupils, whether availing of this scheme or not, will need to bring in something for their 'Little Break'.

The School Lunch Provider will adhere to the required Healthy Ireland Nutrition Standards for School Meals. The school lunch provider will adhere to the required Healthy Ireland Nutrition Standards for School Meals.

- Hot Meal Nutritional Breakdown can be found here (March 2026): [\*\*Nutritional Information March 2026\*\*](#)
- School Meals Scheme: [\*\*https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-social-protection/services/school-meals-scheme/\*\*](https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-social-protection/services/school-meals-scheme/)

**Helpful Websites:** The following websites contain guidelines, resources and practical support for individuals and families to make healthier food choices.

- [\*\*Click here for the Food Pyramid\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Click here for tips about Planning Meals\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Healthy Lunchbox tips\*\*](#)



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### What should be in a healthy lunch box?

A healthy lunchbox should include a variety of foods from the food groups represented in the Food Pyramid, together with water as the recommended drink.

| Food Pyramid Level                          | Some Suggestions                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fruit and vegetables                        | Apple, banana, mandarin orange, pear, berries, grapes, carrot sticks, cucumber, sliced pepper, fruit salad, tomato etc.                              |
| A portion of starchy food                   | Wholemeal bread, wholegrain bap, bagel, wrap, pitta pocket, rice, pasta, crackers, oatcakes, plain rice cakes, plain breadsticks, plain popcorn etc. |
| A portion of dairy food                     | Piece of cheese, natural or very low sugar yogurt                                                                                                    |
| A portion of lean meat, fish or alternative | Chicken, turkey, ham, tuna, egg, hummus                                                                                                              |
| A drink                                     | Water                                                                                                                                                |

| The following are <b><u>not permitted</u></b> in St Patrick's Loreto                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chewing gum</li><li>• Crisps including crisp-style snacks e.g. Snax, Hoola Hoops, Pringles, tortilla chips etc.</li><li>• Fizzy drinks, cans, glass bottles</li><li>• Milk – due to the lack of refrigeration space</li><li>• Snacks high in sugar, saturated fat, salt, additives and preservatives e.g. sweets/share bags, fruit winders, chocolate, cereal bars, lollipops</li><li>• <b>Nuts and food products containing nuts are not permitted in St Patrick's Loreto. This measure supports the management of serious food allergies.</b></li></ul> |

### Treats:

All pupils are encouraged to adhere to our healthy eating policy from Monday to Thursday. Any pupil who brings sweets or sweet treats to school on these days will be requested to keep them in their bag and bring them back home.

On **Fridays**, parents/guardians may allow their child to bring **one, small** treat to school, along with their usual healthy lunch. This sweet treat could be a mini-size bar, a bun or two biscuits. It could also be a special fruit, smoothie or homemade treat. **Given the number of**



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**children who have food allergies and intolerances, parents/guardians are respectfully asked not to send in treats for the class, regardless of the occasion.**

Treats may be permitted on special occasions such as Christmas Colours Day, the last day of term, on school tours etc. Chewing gum, fizzy drinks, cans, glass bottles, share bags of sweets and share bags of crisps are not allowed in school or on school related activities, at any time.

### **Promotion and Implementation of the Policy:**

Our HPS Team was set up in 2016, and it aims to promote healthy eating habits within the whole school community. The HPS team will collaborate with staff, pupils and parents/guardians to ensure the successful implementation of the Healthy Eating policy. They will do this through the following measures:

- The Healthy Eating Policy will be made available for all parents/guardians on our school website
- All staff members will have access to our Healthy Eating Policy on Microsoft Teams
- All Board of Management members will receive a copy of our Healthy Eating Policy
- The Healthy Eating Policy will be displayed prominently on the HPS notice board
- Reference will be made to the policy at the annual meetings for parents/guardians of incoming infant children
- All teachers will outline the contents of this policy at the start of the new school year with their class
- All teachers will reinforce the guidelines of the policy at regular intervals
- Assemblies will also be used to reinforce the guidelines of the policy at regular intervals
- Integration, where appropriate, with other areas of the curriculum such as History, Science, SPHE, Geography, Art, English, Gaeilge and PE is encouraged
- Be Well Week may take place in our school depending on each school years calendar. There will be a particular focus on healthy eating during that week. Healthy Eating surveys may be carried out at this time

If a pupil brings prohibited food or drink to school, they will be asked by the teacher to bring it home at the end of the school day, as such foods are not allowed. If the pupil does not have anything else to eat, the teacher will deal with the matter at his/her discretion. If a pupil persists in bringing prohibited foods to school, the teacher will organise a phone call/meeting with the pupil's parent/guardian to remind them of St Patrick's Loreto's Healthy Eating Policy. School staff will consistently implement the Healthy Eating Policy to ensure that it is adhered to.



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### **Monitoring and Evaluation:**

The effective implementation of this policy will be monitored by the Principal, the HPS team and staff. Monitoring and evaluation will be carried out formally and informally throughout the year to measure the progress, effectiveness and any constraints of the desired outcomes of the policy. The focus will be on positive reinforcement as a way of encouraging healthier lunches.

#### **Formal:**

When Be Well Week takes place, a Healthy Lunch Survey will be carried out during that time. The results will be compared to previous years.

#### **Informal:**

Monitoring of more general aspects of healthy eating such as break time snacks and drinking water, will be carried out informally through observation, discussion and consultation with staff (both teaching and non-teaching), parents/guardians and the HPS committee.

We will use the following success criteria to monitor and evaluate our work on healthy eating:

- Greater proportion of healthy food in lunchboxes – comparing survey results each year
- Reduction in the amount of high fat, high sugar and high salt food being consumed during the school day
- Greater understanding and awareness by pupils of the need to eat a nutritious and balanced diet

Methods of data collection will include:

- General observations
- Healthy Lunch Surveys
- Feedback from Suggestion Boxes placed around the school

By working together with our catering partner, parents/guardians, and pupils, St Patrick's Loreto aims to foster a culture of healthy eating that supports the physical, mental, and academic development of every child. We believe that by making healthy food choices a part of our daily school routine, we can instil lifelong habits that promote well-being and success.

This policy will be officially evaluated every 2 years by the HPS team.



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This policy was ratified by the Board of Management on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2026.

Signed:

Gráine McGowan, Chairperson

### **Appendix A – Consultation Key Findings**

Healthy Eating Surveys were carried out in Term 3 of 2026 as part of the review and development of the school's Healthy Eating Policy.

- 213 pupil responses
- 21 staff responses
- 32 parent/guardian responses

#### **Key Findings**

The consultation demonstrated strong support for a whole-school Healthy Eating Policy. Respondents recognised the positive work already taking place in the school, while identifying a need for greater consistency, clearer communication with families and practical guidance for implementation.



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### **Strong support for a Healthy Eating Policy**

There was unanimous support among staff, with 21 staff members (100%) supporting the development of a Healthy Eating Policy. Parent/guardian support was also strong, with 27 of 32 respondents (84%) supporting the development and implementation of the policy.

Pupils demonstrated good awareness of some key healthy eating concepts. 177 pupils (83.1%) reported knowing what the Food Pyramid is, although almost half of pupils (48.8%) were unsure whether they themselves had a healthy diet.

### **The school promotes healthy eating**

Staff identified a range of existing initiatives and practices that support healthy eating, including SPHE lessons, Food Dudes, fruit and vegetable tasting, school meals, gardening, wellbeing initiatives, classroom discussions and staff modelling healthy choices.

However, staff identified some inconsistency in implementation. Concerns included uncertainty about how lunchboxes should be monitored, differences in approaches between staff members and difficulties when discussing lunch contents with parents/guardians.

A clear, consistent whole-school approach was therefore identified as important.

### **Fruit and vegetable consumption**

The clearest area for development identified in the pupil survey was vegetable consumption.

| <b>Food</b> | <b>Every day</b> | <b>1–4 days per week</b> | <b>Never</b> |
|-------------|------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| Fruit       | 70.9%            | 27.7%                    | 1.4%         |
| Vegetables  | 9.9%             | 40.8%                    | 49.3%        |

While 98.6% of pupils reported having fruit at least some days during the school week, almost half (49.3%) reported never having vegetables at school lunch.

Pupils themselves frequently identified more fruit and vegetables, particularly carrots, cucumber and peppers, as changes that would make their lunches healthier.

### **Hydration**

128 pupils (60.1%) reported drinking 500 ml or more of water per day. However, 85 pupils (39.9%) reported drinking less than 500 ml or described their intake as “not a lot”.

Hydration should therefore remain an area for encouragement and education.

### **Lunch satisfaction and variety**

Pupils generally expressed positive views about their lunches, with 195 pupils (91.5%) reporting that they liked their school lunch.



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Pupils identified a wide variety of preferred foods, including fruit, sandwiches, wraps, pasta, yoghurt, cheese, chicken and other culturally diverse foods. Suggestions for improvement focused on greater variety, appealing presentation and increased fruit and vegetable choices, rather than simply making lunches more restrictive.

### **Treats and food-based rewards**

Friday treats were a significant theme in the consultation. 175 pupils (82.2%) reported having a treat on Friday only, while 20 pupils (9.4%) reported having treats on two or more days per week.

Staff views on the use of sweets or chocolate as rewards were divided:

- 17 staff (81%) supported their use
- 4 staff (19%) did not

Staff who supported treats generally emphasised moderation and occasional use, while those who did not support food-based rewards suggested alternatives such as stickers, stationery and class points.

The consultation highlighted the need for the policy to clearly distinguish between occasional treats and the routine use of food as a behavioural reward, and to ensure consistency across the school.

### **Parents/guardians and communication**

Staff recognised that parents/guardians are primarily responsible for preparing younger children's lunchboxes and therefore identified parental engagement as essential.

Parents/guardians identified common challenges including time and convenience, fussy eating, cost, food waste, providing variety and making healthy foods appealing.

18 parents/guardians (56%) indicated that they would like further information about developing healthy eating habits for their child.

The consultation therefore supports providing families with clear, practical information about:

- suitable lunchbox choices
- foods that are discouraged or not permitted
- treats and special occasions
- healthy lunch ideas
- reliable healthy eating resources

### **Overall Conclusion**

The consultation provides strong support for the Healthy Eating Policy. The main priorities identified are:



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1. Consistent implementation across the whole school.
2. Clear communication with pupils, staff and families.
3. Increasing vegetable consumption.
4. Encouraging adequate water intake.
5. Providing healthy choices that are varied and appealing to children.
6. Establishing clear expectations regarding treats and food-based rewards.
7. Supporting parents/guardians with practical information and resources.

### **Appendix B – Parent/Guardian Consultation**

A parent/guardian survey was undertaken as part of the review and development of the Healthy Eating Policy. 32 responses were received.

#### **Key Results**

| <b>Survey area</b>                | <b>Result</b> |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| Support the Healthy Eating Policy | 27 (84%)      |



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|                                               |          |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------|
| Unsure                                        | 3 (9%)   |
| Do not support                                | 2 (6%)   |
| Consider their child's diet healthy           | 27 (84%) |
| Unsure about child's diet                     | 3 (9%)   |
| Do not consider child's diet healthy          | 2 (6%)   |
| Would like further healthy eating information | 18 (56%) |
| Child uses hot school lunch service           | 20 (63%) |
| Child does not use hot school lunch service   | 12 (38%) |

### **Main Issues Identified**

Parents/guardians reported that foods sometimes left uneaten included fruit, sandwiches, hot meals, vegetables, pasta and crackers. Some parents reported that very little or no food was regularly left uneaten.

The main challenges in providing healthy lunches were:

- time and convenience
- providing variety
- fussy eating and sensory preferences
- making healthy food appealing
- freshness and food waste
- cost
- supporting children's increasing independence
- the influence of other children's lunches

### **Parent/Guardian Information Needs**

The consultation indicates that families would benefit from practical guidance on healthy lunchboxes, including examples of suitable foods, information on foods that are discouraged/not permitted, guidance on treats and special occasions, and links to reliable healthy eating resources.

The survey also identified an opportunity to provide further information or workshops for families interested in developing healthy eating habits.

## **Appendix C – Pupil Consultation**

A pupil survey was undertaken as part of the review and development of the Healthy Eating Policy. 213 pupils responded.

### **Key Results**



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| Survey area                          | Results     |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| Have fruit every day                 | 151 (70.9%) |
| Have fruit 1–4 days per week         | 59 (27.7%)  |
| Never have fruit                     | 3 (1.4%)    |
| Have vegetables every day            | 21 (9.9%)   |
| Have vegetables 1–4 days per week    | 87 (40.8%)  |
| Never have vegetables                | 105 (49.3%) |
| Consider their diet healthy          | 99 (46.5%)  |
| Unsure about their diet              | 104 (48.8%) |
| Do not consider their diet healthy   | 10 (4.7%)   |
| Know what the Food Pyramid is        | 177 (83.1%) |
| Unsure about the Food Pyramid        | 21 (9.9%)   |
| Do not know the Food Pyramid         | 15 (7.0%)   |
| Drink 500 ml+ water per day          | 128 (60.1%) |
| Drink less than 500 ml               | 60 (28.2%)  |
| Describe water intake as “not a lot” | 25 (11.7%)  |
| Friday treat only                    | 175 (82.2%) |
| Treats 2+ days per week              | 20 (9.4%)   |
| Never/hardly ever have treats        | 18 (8.5%)   |
| Like their school lunch              | 195 (91.5%) |
| Do not like their school lunch       | 18 (8.5%)   |

### **What Pupils Told Us**

Pupils generally expressed positive views about their lunches. Favourite foods included fruit, sandwiches, wraps, pasta, yoghurt, cheese, chicken and a range of other foods.

When asked what would make lunches healthier or more enjoyable, the most common suggestions were:

- more fruit and vegetables
- greater variety
- fruit salads
- carrots, cucumber and peppers
- more sandwiches and wraps
- greater variety in hot school lunches

Some pupils also requested additional treat foods. These responses reinforce the importance of providing healthy choices that are appealing, varied and enjoyable.

Overall, the pupil consultation identified vegetable consumption, hydration, variety and healthy choice awareness as key areas for continued focus.



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### **Appendix D – Staff Consultation**



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A staff survey was undertaken as part of the review and development of the Healthy Eating Policy. 21 staff members responded.

### **Key Results**

| <b>Survey area</b>                                     | <b>Results</b> |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Support a Healthy Eating Policy                        | 21 (100%)      |
| Believe the school environment supports healthy eating | 18 (85.7%)     |
| Do not believe the environment supports healthy eating | 3 (14.3%)      |
| Do staff support healthy eating among pupils - Yes     | 17 (81%)       |
| Do staff support healthy eating among pupils - No      | 4 (19%)        |
| Healthy eating is covered through SPHE                 | 21 (100%)      |
| Support sweets/chocolate as rewards                    | 17 (81%)       |
| Do not support sweets/chocolate as rewards             | 4 (19%)        |

### **Existing Strengths**

Staff identified SPHE, Food Dudes, fruit and vegetable tasting, school meals, gardening, wellbeing initiatives, classroom discussions and staff modelling as positive supports for healthy eating.

### **Areas for Development**

The main issues identified were:

- consistency in implementing the policy
- clarity about what foods should be challenged
- confidence in discussing lunchboxes with parents/guardians
- differing approaches between staff members
- influence of other children's lunches
- ensuring all staff understand and apply the policy consistently

### **Staff Suggestions**

Suggested actions included:

- visual reminders and posters
- regular communication with pupils and families
- healthy lunchbox examples
- HSE/HPS resources
- fruit and vegetable tasting
- cooking and healthy eating activities
- Healthy Eating Week
- greater pupil/student council involvement
- ensuring all staff are aware of the agreed policy



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### **Treats and Rewards**

Staff views regarding sweets and chocolate as rewards were divided. Those supporting their use generally favoured occasional use and moderation. Alternatives suggested by staff included stickers, stationery, fidgets, homework passes and class/group rewards.

The consultation highlighted the importance of a clear distinction between occasional treats and food used as a routine behavioural reward, together with a consistent whole-school approach.