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WHOLE SCHOOL FOOD POLICY

September 2014



A WHOLE SCHOOL FOOD POLICY FOR ST. ATTRACTA'S JUNIOR SCHOOL

We have entitled this document, "A Whole School Food Policy" as we see it as a shared, evolving document for ALL those involved with our school. It encourages all aspects of food to be brought together clearly, coherently and consistently. "Food in School" includes the formal curriculum; participation in projects such as "The Green School Project" and "Healthy Eating Week"; consumption of food at school; events at school; pastoral care and welfare issues.

BACKGROUND

Over the last ten years in particular, 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 concerns over the rising number of health issues directly related to an imbalanced diet and lack of exercise.

There is also a growing realisation of the role a balanced daily diet plays in a child's ability to focus and concentrate and get the most from his/her time spent in school.

Here in St. Attracta's J. N. S. we have for many years encouraged a healthy option of fruit, yoghurt or cheese at the small break time. We have also encouraged parents to provide their children with lunches that are sugar free.

In recent times, more and more parents and staff, through the Board of Management and The Parents Association, have expressed a desire for the school to move towards a Healthy Eating Policy that strongly encourages and actively promotes and recommends completely sugar free lunch boxes.

The Report of the National Task Force on Obesity published on 16th May 2005 stated:

"The taskforce are very concerned that childhood obesity has become the most prevalent childhood disease in Europe. It is estimated that over 300,000 children on the island of Ireland are overweight and obese and this is projected to increase annually by 10,000. It is clear that halting the rise in levels of overweight and obesity presents a major challenge. This can only be done by a concerted effort by everyone to protect future generations from the inevitable premature deaths, ill health, psychosocial problems and the projected adverse economic costs on society that will arise if we do nothing."

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.

The Report of the National Task Force on Obesity recommended:

"All schools, as part of their school development planning, should be encouraged to develop consistent school policies to promote healthy eating and active living, with the necessary support from the Department of Education and Science. Such policies should address opportunities for physical activity, and in the case of primary schools in partnership with parents, children's lunch boxes."

This policy document strives to address this recommendation.

AIMS OF THE POLICY

- To work in partnership with families and professionals to support children aged 4-9 years to develop healthy eating practices and active living which will become embedded for life
- To work in partnership with parents and professionals working with children, to deliver an effective and consistent approach to healthy eating practices, and to ensure that individual cultural and dietary needs are met
- To raise awareness with children, parents/carers, and other professionals, of the need to develop a positive approach to food, nutrition and oral health education
- To encourage responsibility and accountability in parents/carers and professionals in offering healthy choices to children
- To promote healthy eating and oral health as necessary and enjoyable aspects of the lives of children
- To highlight the balance between food intake and physical activity in our daily living
- To encourage parents to provide, and children to eat a full breakfast as research indicates that children benefit both nutritionally and behaviourally by eating a healthy breakfast. It allows the child to take full advantage of the education provided by improving concentration levels and attention spans

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL

- To strongly encourage and advise parents to, facilitate healthy choices; to provide children with sugar free lunchboxes; to minimise “sweet treats” after school hours
- To encourage parents to walk their children to school when and where it is safe to do so
- Through the **Social Personal & Health Education Curriculum** and the **Social Environmental & Scientific Education Curriculum** to develop an awareness and understanding of healthy eating.
- To position healthy eating in the broader context of healthy living, i.e. oral health, cooking, daily exercise etc
- To provide children with a P.E. programme which is varied
- To encourage active and safe play in the playground at break times
- To encourage children to make healthy choices and to take responsibility for the choices they make
- To promote the “5 A Day” message, by encouraging fruit / vegetables as important elements of the child’s lunch box
- To promote the consumption of water as much as possible and to provide children with opportunities to drink water on a regular basis at school
- To promote a “sugar free” reward system in school, except on special occasions
- To invite health care professionals, such as the dentist/dental nurse, the doctor/nurse to the school to speak to the children

LIST OF ACCEPTABLE & UNACCEPTABLE FOODS **DRAWN UP BY THE CHILDREN**

***PARENTS COULD REFER CHILDREN TO IT IF “PESTER POWER”
COMES INTO PLAY!***

PLEASE INCLUDE THESE ITEMS IN YOUR CHILD’S LUNCHBOX:

- Plain Popcorn
- All fruits, vegetables and dried fruits
- Crackers, wholegrain bread, pita bread
- Natural or Fruit Yogurt (not chocolate), please read labels and be aware of sugar content
- Fillings such as, meats, fish, egg, pate, tomatoes, cheese, cole slaw, peanut butter,
- Water, fruit juice, (Please read labels and be aware of sugar content of some juices)
- Milk
- Water

***PLEASE DO NOT INCLUDE THESE ITEMS IN YOUR CHILD’S
LUNCHBOX***

- Fizzy, sugary drinks
- Cakes, buns and biscuits
- Bars and sweets
- Cereal bars, such as, Nutri Grain, Coco Pop, Frosties, Rice Crispie bars etc
- Fruit winders
- Frubes (As they are full of sugar, very difficult for children to open and squirt everywhere!)
- Yogurt with a high sugar/colouring, content
- Crisps, Hoola Hoops, Monster Munchies etc
- Chocolate Spread

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10th September 2014

TOTAL SUGAR FREE SCHOOL FROM SEPTEMBER 2014 – PARENTS PLEASE READ ON ...

Dear Parents,

In the interests of the health and wellbeing of all our pupils St. Attracta's J.N.S. is implementing a total ban on all sugar products such as sweets, cakes, biscuits and sugary drinks, during school hours. This decision was not made lightly. In arriving at it we looked at and discussed:

- teachers' experience of sugar products in the school over the last few years
- the very serious national and international concerns surrounding childhood obesity and fitness
- dental concerns expressed by the HSE dentists and private dentists
- the concerns of parents regarding the volume of sugar items being consumed by children in school
- the growing number of children enrolled in the school with very serious food allergies which can lead to anaphylactic shock
- the ongoing possibility of children who could react to a food/ingredient which they have not reacted to before
- the need to seriously implement our **"Healthy Eating Policy"**

Most of us love sweet things, and sweet items like most foods are fine in moderation. However, we have found that the amount of sweet items being handed to a class teacher by well meaning parents/children to share with *ALL* children in the class, to celebrate a special occasion such as a child's birthday, the last day of term or their return from a holiday abroad etc has grown exponentially in the last two years. These are kind, generous and well meant gestures on the part of those concerned; unfortunately, it creates serious difficulties. Teachers have to check ingredients to see if they are suitable for certain pupils; some pupils may not like the particular product and we don't have an alternative to offer; we never know if a child could have a reaction to a particular ingredient in the product. In some classes these "sharing" occasions happen a number of times a week; therefore the amount of sugar being consumed by a child on these items alone is very high. A number of parents are, quite understandably, not happy that their child is eating so many sweet products in school when they themselves are taking our "Healthy Eating Policy" very seriously and are giving their child a totally "sugar free" lunchbox.

As a school community we are very aware of and concerned about the striking growth in and implications of childhood obesity in Ireland. Currently one in four children in Ireland is overweight or obese. According to the World Health Organisation and the UK Health Forum, Ireland could become Europe's heaviest and most obese nation by 2030.

Professor Dónal O'Shea says that the scientific evidence there is towards sugar contributing to the obesity crisis is stronger now than ever before. "Reduce sugar intake in children and you will lower the impact on the child's weight" he says. "Sugar is addictive in the same way alcohol is addictive".

PLEASE, DO NOT SEND IN ANY FOOD TO SCHOOL FOR SHARING WITH OTHER CHILDREN AND PLEASE DO NOT PUT LUNCH ITEMS CONTAINING SUGAR IN YOUR CHILD'S LUNCHBOX. Unfortunately, we will have no option but to return all such items to you. Please give your child water rather than juice to drink in school and please ensure that anyone involved in assembling the contents of your child's lunchbox is aware of "no sugars".

Teachers will not give children sugar based rewards. The exceptions to the "no sugar" policy *may* be a party in the classroom at perhaps Halloween, Christmas, Easter or the Summer holidays.

Please do not embarrass either yourself or your child by being the parent who flouts this policy. It is being implemented with the best interests of children's health at heart.

We look forward to full cooperation from all parents/guardians.

Yours sincerely,

Eithne Roycroft, Principal

Please turn over to see "Childhood Obesity - The Facts" and "Physical Activity in Children".

