

## **Healthy Eating - Healthy Living Policy**

### **Introduction**

Research shows that approximately 7% of a child's diet is eaten in school and while this may seem quite small, in Scoil Mhuire, we see it is a great opportunity to help children and parents/guardians to focus on healthy eating and the social aspect of eating. Research also suggests that,

- eating and drinking habits
- diet patterns
- choice of foods
- attitudes to activity and exercise
- attitudes to health
- health literacy
- an understanding or concept of wellbeing
- attitudes towards our mental health

are set early in life and are dependent on the family situation in which we find ourselves and the example that we witness at home. This challenge is one for parents, pre-schools, primary schools, education in general and society as a whole, in the context of government support. It is evident that while the health of the nation is a societal issue, it is important to start with children as an investment in the future that may not have an immediate or visible pay off.

Society is only recently waking up to the issues surrounding healthy eating/drinking and a healthy lifestyle to assist us in our physical and mental well-being. We need to acknowledge the role a healthy diet plays in a child's life and the ability to focus, to concentrate and to learn.

### **Aims:**

Our aims include:

- teaching children to make healthy choices regarding food and drink
- showing children the connection between balancing food intake and physical activity or output in their daily routine
- developing a positive approach to food, drink and all areas of nutrition
- developing an understanding of all aspects of health education
- providing an effective and consistent approach to healthy eating practices, while respecting individual, dietary, cultural and special needs
- promoting healthy eating/drinking and active living as vital elements of healthy living and enjoyment
- teaching children to make informed choices now and in later in life

Scoil Mhuire management and staff will work with parents and the relevant agencies to develop an awareness and understanding of healthy eating/drinking and active living through the

- Social Personal & Health Education Curriculum
  - Social Environmental & Scientific Education Curriculum
- Healthy eating /drinking will be placed in the bigger picture of Healthy Living and Wellbeing and will include such topics as

- ✓ oral health
- ✓ hydration – bringing water to school in a reusable bottle which children can drink at anytime just like members of staff
- ✓ cooking
- ✓ daily exercise
- ✓ educating children to make healthy choices
- ✓ taking responsibility for the choices they make
- ✓ requesting that parents ensure that children have a healthy breakfast every day before school
- ✓ requesting that parents provide children with balanced healthy lunchboxes
- ✓ requesting that they facilitate children’s healthy choices
- ✓ requesting that lunchboxes are free of bars and sweets, and especially nuts and products that may contain nuts
- ✓ requesting parents encourage children to have responsibility and independence regarding their own lunchboxes
- ✓ promoting the ‘5 A Day’ message, by encouraging fruit and vegetables as important elements of the child’s lunch box
- ✓ encouraging the school’s milk scheme, whereby provision is made for a carton of cold milk at lunchtime

Scoil Mhuire takes great care of children with **special needs of any sort** and this includes dietary needs and cultural differences as they arise.

The Seomra Cúraim is used for feeding children with Special Needs and has been designed to provide a calm ambience for same.

Through the Aistear Programme and SPHE we will invite health care professionals to inform and educate the children according to teacher plans and the stage of development of children in their class:

- ✓ dentist
- ✓ dental nurse
- ✓ chef
- ✓ doctor
- ✓ nurse
- ✓ nutritionist
- ✓ physiotherapist
- ✓ sports coaches

In Scoil Mhuire we have always encouraged parents and guardians to provide a healthy lunch and snack for school. Staff, parents, the Board of Management

and the Parents Association, have worked on developing a policy for the school that encourages and recommends:

- healthy eating
- regular exercise
- active ways of coming to school

It is our belief that diet and exercise must be a visible, living and practised element of our SPHE policy. "Mens sane in corpore sano."

## **Obesity**

While there is great concern about childhood obesity and obesity in general, we believe that the approach should be one of general wellbeing and healthy lifestyle rather than demonising children who may be overweight through no fault of their own but because of poor understanding of nutrition and exercise by parents /guardians. We seek to work with the PA committee in the provision of talks and workshops for parents which include nutrition, wellbeing and a healthy lifestyle.

Primary Schools cannot combat the issue of childhood obesity in isolation and must work with parents and government as a partner in this battle that is one of the most serious challenges facing the western world.

## **Body Image**

Distorted body image is also a real problem facing children and adults and especially in the context of peer pressure, social media, and the internet.

As early as Second Class, we have heard children stating that " Girl X" is too fat to wear a white dress, which is extremely sad and worrying.

Teachers need to work closely with parents/guardians to ensure that no child goes unobserved if there are signs of not eating, losing weight for no apparent reason, hiding food, disposing of food behind radiators and any other unusual signs of not eating a balanced diet that supports the required activity in school.

Children should be supported and praised in a holistic way that supports them as they grow and develop and stresses their individual beauty and creativity.

As part of our Plean Scoile, we seek to continually promote a healthy life style in everything we do through communication and co-operation.

This requires the necessary support from the Department of Education and Skills and initiatives like :

- Active Schools week
- Food Dudes
- School garden or growing project
- Science projects and competitions
- Active Schools week which is very popular and successful in Scoil Mhuire

Healthy Eating and Drinking is a vital area within the SPHE programme and with this in mind, we plead with parents to provide a healthy lunch,

- Sandwich
- Pasta
- Salad
- Fruit
- Yoghurt [milk is available in school.]

***Please ensure that we know about any special needs, allergies, etc.***

Each girl should have her own simple lunch box from which she eats. Each girl brings home all her leftovers. For two reasons:

1. So that the parents are aware of what the child has eaten and/or not eaten
2. As part of our Green School and approach to waste, it helps if children bring home their leftovers, wrappers, cartons etc.

**No pre packaged food – Lunchables etc.**

**No sweets No glass bottles No crisps or Candy**

Teachers do give the *occasional* sweet treat for good work or behaviour and this does not interfere with a Healthy approach to eating in general. There are lessons in each class during the year about healthy eating as part of the Social, Personal and Health Education.

### **Evaluation and Review.**

A copy of this policy on healthy eating can be obtained from the office or on the website. This policy will be reviewed regularly at the request of staff, parents, pupils, the Board of Management and as the need arises.

This policy has been updated by staff with input from parents and the Circular 0042/2018 which deals with Wellbeing.

Ratified by the Board of Management on the \_\_\_\_\_

Signed : \_\_\_\_\_

Barry Fitzpatrick, Chairperson

Update: Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Josephine Henry, Chairperson