

# Healthy Eating Policy

## Background

Burren Sonas Kindergarten believes that good health and good food in the early years help to safeguard children's well-being throughout their lives. It is important that children develop healthy eating habits from a young age for both the pleasure of having a wide variety in their diets and gaining knowledge about nutrition.

Food preparation is a central part of our daily rhythm. Cooking together - singing while chopping fruits, kneading dough, or stewing apples - cultivates an atmosphere of connection and gratitude. These activities help children develop motor skills, a sense of accomplishment, and a deeper connection to their community.

In the Steiner tradition, meals are a communal, ritualistic event. Before eating, we light a candle and share a seasonal verse, followed by a blessing. Our meal times are treated as an opportunity for social interaction as well as laying the foundations for good nutrition for pre-school children.

## Resources

This policy is underpinned by the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016, and Túsła's Quality Regulator Framework Guidelines for Pre-School Services 2006.

## Guidelines

### *Behavior*

- Teachers will model respectful behavior at meal times to demonstrate appreciation and respect for the children, each other, food, the food producers and the people who prepare the meals.

### *Nutritious Food*

- Our daily hot meals are prepared in accordance with national nutritional guidelines and the children's food pyramid, which emphasizes complex carbohydrates, fruit, vegetables, and dairy integrated into the meals. Ingredients are sourced organically whenever possible.
- We align our food practices with the Waldorf Steiner tradition, which emphasizes serving a different grain each day to provide a diverse range of nutrients while instilling a sense of rhythm in the children's weekly routine.

- Our weekly menu served in addition to fruits and vegetables:
- Monday: Brown Rice, cheese, soy sauce, nutritional yeast
- Tuesday: Homemade Wholegrain Bread, butter, sugar-free fruit preserve
- Wednesday: Organic Oats (porridge / granola) milk (cow or dairy-free), maple syrup
- Thursday: Homemade Vegetable soup and wholegrain bread, butter
- Friday: Pasta, cheese and / or vegetable soup, cheese, nutritional yeast.
- Water is served to the children at meal time and is available on request at any time.

### **Our Communal Food Culture**

○ Children are encouraged to participate in the daily offered hot meals to experience a shared enjoyable experience with their peers and teachers.

Families are asked to contribute one piece of fruit or vegetable daily to the sharing plate, which is cut up and enjoyed across the group. If this contribution keeps being forgotten, a staff member will speak with that parent / guardian to work out alternative ways to contribute this food each week.

○ All our meal times are treated as a social occasion. Tables are set up with the help of the children, with placemats, appropriate cutlery, and plates/bowls/glasses. Various jobs are rotated fairly amongst children, such as serving fruit and laying the table. Staff sit and share the same meal with the children, encouraging children to speak and listen to each other in friendly conversation.

○ Kindergarten staff use food preparation and meal times to help children become aware of composting and recycling, as they are implemented in the kindergarten.

○ As part of healthy eating, we encourage children to sit and take part in preparing, serving, and eating meals together.

○ Teachers will communicate with parents/guardians how children are eating. If children are not eating well, teachers will discuss other options with parents/guardians and follow up after initial discussions.

### **Food Safety and Hygiene**

○ All food prepared in the kindergarten is stored in closed cupboards and a refrigerator to prevent cross-contamination. (\*This is except for the sharing fruit /vegetables brought into the facility by the children.)

- The sharing fruit / vegetables brought in is washed prior to preparing and serving.
- Proper hygiene is rigorously followed, according to HACCP guidelines.
- We are a vegetarian facility and no meat is served or handled in the kindergarten.
- Teachers consistently oversee the children engaging in the proper hand washing routine before preparing, serving, and eating food. Children are taught to cough and sneeze into their elbows when around food. Handwashing is required after these episodes, and any affected food is discarded.

### **Nutritious Compliance**

- Food and drink provided by Burren Sonas Kindergarten is nutritious, wholesome and complies with the national guidance on healthy eating and nutrition. See Healthy Ireland for more information: [260031\\_f9394732-e700-447f-8f6f-1f101c6f9565.pdf](#)
- Food is only purchased from reputable suppliers who comply with food safety practices.

### **Celebratory Treats**

On special occasions and birthdays, home-baked goods are shared. We ask parents to focus on healthy, no-refined sugar recipes if bringing in food to share, and savoury goods are also very welcome.

- Some younger children who attend the kindergarten are not yet allowed to consume sugar, which can have a strong effect on them. For this reason, the use of food coloring, artificial sweeteners, preservatives, and large quantities of refined sugar is not permitted in recipes which will be shared.
- On days when sweet baking or watered down apple juice has been given to the children, staff will let parents/guardians know.
- If there is a child with food allergies in the group, parents / guardians will be notified in advance of preparing home-baking to refrain from using any ingredients which may cause an allergic reaction.

## **Communicating with Parents/Guardians**

- Parents/guardians will be informed of this policy and its contents when they enroll their child in Burren Sonas Kindergarten.
- Our daily food menu is displayed on the wall above the painting rack in the main room.
- Parents/guardians will be advised if their child is not eating or drinking well, and a plan will be put in place in cooperation with the parent / guardians.
- Recipes and food ingredients will be available to parents / guardians upon request.

## **Specific Dietary Requirements**

- The staff are happy to support the special dietary requirements of children in their care, in consultation with parents/guardians. It is necessary for parents/guardians to meet with staff to outline their child's dietary needs and create a plan for best food practices to facilitate their needs.
- If the menu offered at the kindergarten is not suitable, food brought in from home is permitted, with prior consultation with the staff. Parents must discuss such arrangements with teachers in advance of bringing in food from home, and adhere to the health and safety guidelines provided by the staff to prevent risk of foods classified as allergens and choke hazards.
- There may be very occasional changes to the menu for festivals, requests by children, or special celebrations. In these cases, the staff will endeavour to provide a suitable alternative option to any children with specific dietary requirements.

## **Providing Food from Home**

Staff are responsible for administering lunch and snacks for the children, and parents are asked not to send any additional snacks or other food into the kindergarten, unless a prior arrangement has been made with the staff.

Lunchboxes or food brought from home is permitted only in exceptional circumstances. Parents / guardians must discuss such arrangements with teachers in advance of bringing in food from home and provide a doctor's note outlining specific dietary needs, if required. *(Please see our Lunchbox Policy for more information).*

Food brought in from home must adhere to the following guidelines:

- Meat-free: May include eggs and dairy.
- Allergen-free: No nuts, shellfish, or white melon (for 2024/2025).
- Additional allergens may be identified annually based on enrolment forms.
- Nutritionally balanced: Follow the food pyramid by including a balance of carbohydrates, fibre, fats and proteins.
- Prohibited items: No chocolates, biscuits, sweets, crisps, sugar-added yoghurts or soft drinks.
- If food brought into the service for a birthday or celebration day is not appropriate, the food will not be shared, and the children will be offered a suitable alternative by the staff.

### **Food Allergies and Intolerances**

The safety and well-being of our children are our top priorities at the kindergarten. We recognise the seriousness of food allergies and have implemented comprehensive preventative measures to ensure a safe environment for all children.

- Staff must be made aware if any of the children have any allergies or intolerances, including but not limited to:
  - Peanuts and tree nuts
  - Wheat (gluten)
  - Sesame seeds
  - Fish and shellfish
  - Dairy products
  - Eggs
  - Soya
  - Wasp or bee stings
  - Penicillin or other drugs
- Parents / guardians will be asked to clearly write any allergies their children may have on their enrolment forms to ensure the health and safety of their child. Any specific dietary requirement also needs to be written on the child's enrolment form.

- Any of the 14 legislated food allergens used in kindergarten food will be noted adjacent to the menu board located over the painting rack/desk to inform parents/guardians.
- Children are supervised at all times while eating to quickly address any signs of an allergic reaction.
- Staff are trained to recognize symptoms of allergic reactions and are prepared to take immediate action, including administering any necessary medication.
- Parents / guardians are informed immediately if their child experiences any allergic reaction or if there are concerns about their child's diet.

**Resources:**

- Healthy Ireland: Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Preschools
- HSE: Healthy Lunchbox Leaflet

**This policy links with our -**

- Lunchbox policy
- Risk management policy
- Inclusion Policy
- Staff training policy
- Supervision policy

Person Responsible: Blandine Mahfouf

This policy was adopted by Burren Sonas Kindergarten on: 03 December 2024

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Signed by:  Chairperson on behalf of

Management Review date:

**Links:**

This policy is in line with national guidance on healthy eating and nutrition. See Healthy Ireland for more information: [260031\\_f9394732-e700-447f-8f6f-1f101c6f9565.pdf](#)

Additional resources from HSE Ireland:

[healthy-lunchbox-leaflet.pdf](#)

Resources for hot meals provided from Healthy Ireland:

[128268\\_d07bed24-dd1d-4055-8ced-5e381621ca65.pdf](#)

Resources for hot meals provided by the Department of Health & Children:

Food & Nutrition Guidelines for Pre-schools: [3865-HPU\\_guide\\_5](#)