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Healthy Eating Policy

A Whole School Healthy Eating Food Policy for GETNS

This policy has been titled a 'Whole School Food Policy' as we see it as a shared document which is evolving all the time for all those involved with our school.

Background

Over the last number of years 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 concern over the rising number of health issues directly related to an imbalanced diet and lack of exercise.

The healthy eating policy at GETNS was originally devised by a team of parents, teachers and students in 2004. It was devised to promote a positive and healthy attitude to nutrition for the whole school community at GETNS.

It is an inherent aspiration of the ethos of Educate Together in general, and GETNS in particular to provide a holistic education for its pupils. Education for nutrition is an integral facet of the SPHE curriculum. The practical application of what is taught and learned in this area is achieved through the implementation of the Healthy Eating Policy.

Two teachers at GETNS took part in a HSE Training day focusing on Nutrition and Healthy Eating, which looked at reviewing our school policy with the entire school community. During the last school year the whole school also took part in the Foods Dudes programme so our school approach to healthy eating has really come to the forefront this year.

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 published in May 2005 recommends:

“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 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 as part of our Green Schools policy.
- 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. [Food dudes]

- 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.

Healthy Lunchboxes

In line with the Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Primary Schools, a Healthy Lunch for a child of Primary school age consists of the following:

- 2 or more pieces of Bread or cereals
- 1 or more pieces of Fruit or Veg
- 1 serving of milk, cheese, yogurt
- Low fat milk should be served to all children over 5 years
- 1 serving of meat, fish or chicken

The GETNS policy endorses these guidelines and recommends that parents adhere to them in preparation of school lunches. GETNS is a nut free school.

Drinks accompanying school lunches should be nutritious and should not be of the ‘Fizzy’ variety. We recommend low fat milks, and yogurts, and soups. Fruit juices only to be drunk while also eating, not between breaks to minimalise tooth decay.

Healthy snacks we can recommend to include in lunchboxes are as follows:

- Fruit
- Seedless grapes
- Mandarins
- Bananas
- Apples
- Vegetables sticks
- Scones
- Flapjacks
- Raisins
- Popcorn for children over 5
- Crackers, wholegrain bread and pita bread

In the interest of keeping the school environment clean and free from waste, it is recommended that as little packaging as possible is used in the preparation of school lunches.

Teachers and other staff members will model healthy eating patterns and provide support and encouragement to pupils and parents in cultivating healthy eating habits.

We as a whole school team need to look at our Friday as Treat Day policy and consider the most up to date findings on healthy eating with regard to this. At the HSE training it was made clear that Treat days are no longer recommended.

We encourage all members of our whole school community to keep our school a palm oil free space, in keeping with the wishes of our student population, as evidenced by the work of 'Animalo' an environmental group from 4th class 2019.

This policy is a whole school document and a work in development.