



Department
for Education

School food in England

**Departmental advice for governing
bodies**

Revised July 2014

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Summary

About this departmental advice

This advice will help recipients when planning and providing food in schools. It explains how legislation applies to food provided within schools in England. It outlines the role of school governing bodies, and stipulates the legal requirements for food provided across the school day.

We use the term 'must' when the person in question is legally required to do something and 'should' when advice is being offered.

Expiry or review date

This departmental advice will be reviewed in January 2015.

What legislation does this departmental advice relate to?

- Sections 512, 512ZA, 512ZB, 512A and 533 of the [Education Act 1996](#), as amended
- Section 114A of the [School Standards and Framework Act 1998](#)
- 2007 No. 2359 The Education (Nutritional Standards and Requirements for School Food) (England) Regulations 2007, as amended by S.I. 2008/1800 and S.I. 2011/2190 ('the School Food Regulations')

Who is this advice for?

This advice is for governing bodies of primary, secondary, special schools, pupil referral units and academies in England, who provide food to registered pupils.

Key points

- All local authority maintained primary, secondary, special schools and pupil referral units in England must meet national school food standards as set out in the Education (Nutritional Standards and Requirements for School Food) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended). Academies established between September 2008 and September 2010 are required to adhere to the standards through a clause in their funding agreements, as do academies and free schools entering into a funding agreement from June 2014. Academies set up between these dates should use the national school food standards as a guide.

- The national school food standards are in place to ensure that food provided to pupils is nutritious and of high quality; to promote good nutritional health in all pupils; protect those who are nutritionally vulnerable and promote good eating behaviour. Providing good quality school food improves children's health, behaviour and performance.
- **New, revised standards for school food will come into force from 1 January 2015. They have been published in advance to give schools, caterers and others time to familiarise themselves with the changes and to make any necessary preparations.**
 - A user-friendly summary of the standards and guidance to support standards implementation can be found at www.schoolfoodplan.com/standards
 - Revised 2014 regulations at www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-food
 - Government response to the consultation on revised school food standards <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/revised-standards-for-food-in-schools--2>
 - Additional materials to support implementation of the revised school food standards have been produced by the [Children's Food Trust](#).
- The current national school food standards are made up of two main elements: food-based standards, and nutrient-based standards.
- Food-based standards define the foods and drinks that must be provided, those which are restricted, and those which must not be provided. Food-based standards apply to all food and drink provided to pupils on and off school premises and during an extended school day (up to 6pm), including school trips.
- Nutrient-based standards apply only to school lunches. They set out requirements for the amount of energy and 13 nutrients that must be in an average school lunch during a one to four week menu cycle.
- The current Nutritional Standards and Requirements for School Food Regulations are available on legislation.gov.uk:
 - [The Education \(Nutritional Standards and Requirements for School Food\) \(England\) Regulations 2007](#)
 - [The Education \(Nutritional Standards and Requirements for School Food\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2008](#)
 - [The Education \(Nutritional Standards and Requirements for School Food\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2011](#)

- In July 2013, the Department published the '[School Food Plan](#)' which is the outcome of the review of school food commissioned by the Secretary of State for Education in July 2012. The plan contains 16 specific actions aimed at further increasing the quality and take up of school meals; developing a whole-school food culture in every school; and exciting children about good food and cooking so that they can lead healthy lives. The plan can be downloaded from [GOV.UK](#). There is also a [School Food Plan website](#).
- In September 2013 government announced that every child in reception, year 1 and year 2 in state-funded schools will receive a free school lunch from September 2014. We have published an [advice document for schools, local authorities and caterers](#).
- There is funding for schools with over 35% of pupils eligible for free school meals to receive support to set up a breakfast club if they don't already have one. More information and applications can be found on the [Magic Breakfast website](#).
- Junior and secondary schools can sign up to programmes joint funded by the Department for Education to increase school meal take-up where this is currently low. More information and programme links can be found on the [School Food Plan website](#).

Role and responsibilities of governors

School governors are responsible for the provision of school food. A school lunch must be provided for pupils where a meal is requested and either the pupil is eligible for free school lunches, or it would not be unreasonable for lunches to be provided.

Governing bodies are able to decide the form that school lunches take, but must ensure that the lunches and other food and drink provided meets the school food standards.

Although there is no requirement that lunches must be hot meals, hot lunches should be provided wherever possible to ensure that all pupils are able to eat at least one hot meal every day.

School governing bodies must provide school meals to a pupil free of charge if the pupil and/or a parent meets eligibility criteria set out within the Education Act 1996 and a request is received for free meals to be provided either by the pupil or someone acting on their behalf.

Drinking water must be provided free of charge at all times on school premises.

Facilities to eat the food that they bring to school must be provided free of charge for pupils not taking school meals. As a minimum these facilities should include accommodation, furniture and supervision so that pupils can eat food they have brought from home in a safe and social environment.

It is for governing bodies to decide whether to provide fruit and vegetables to pupils, there is no statutory requirement to do so. Four to six year old children in state-funded infant, primary and special schools throughout England are eligible to receive a free piece of fruit or vegetable every school day through the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme (SFVS) administered by the Department of Health. More information is available by downloading the [SFVS factfile](#).

Milk provision

Currently there is no statutory requirement for milk to be provided in schools, it is for governing bodies to decide whether to provide milk to pupils. Where milk is provided it must be free to children who are eligible for free school meals. Charges can be made for all other pupils.

From September 2014 all infant school pupils will be entitled to a free school lunch. Where milk is provided as part of this lunch it must be provided free.

From 1 January 2015 revised school food standards come into force which apply to maintained schools, academies set up prior to 2010 and new academies and free schools. Under these revised standards, schools that provide food and drink on the premises must ensure that lower fat or lactose reduced milk is available to those children

who want it at least once a day during school hours. As now, it must be offered free of charge to those pupils entitled to free school meals and charges can be made for all other pupils.

To assist with the cost of providing milk schools can take part in the [EU School Milk Subsidy Scheme](#). There is also the [Nursery Milk Scheme](#), operated by the Department of Health, which provides free milk to children under the age of 5 at participating schools and childcare settings.

What should the governing body do?

The governing body is responsible for ensuring that the national school food standards are met. How this is carried out will depend on the catering arrangements within the school.

- All food and drink provided in schools must meet the national school food standards. Where food is provided by the local authority or a private caterer, compliance with the school food standards should be specified within the catering contract or service level agreement and the caterer should provide the governing body with evidence of compliance with the standards. If the school provides food it should evaluate the food and drink provision against the standards, and produce evidence of compliance.
- There should be a process in place to ensure that catering services are coordinated across all school food and drink outlets to ensure that compliance with the school food standards is maintained.
- The governing body should ensure that it receives regular reports on compliance with the school food standards as well as take-up of school lunches and financial aspects of school food provision.

Governing bodies are strongly encouraged to work with the senior leadership team to develop a whole school food policy; setting out the school's approach to its provision of food, food education (including practical cooking), the role of the catering team as part of the wider school team and the school's strategy to increase the take-up of school lunches.

The Food Standards Agency and the National Governors Association have produced guidance for school governors on [food policy in schools](#). This is available from the NGA website.

School lunch requirements

The School Food Regulations set out the requirements for school lunches provided to registered pupils at a local authority maintained primary, secondary, special school or pupil referral unit, whether on the school premises or not, and to any other person on the school premises.

Current food-based standards for school lunches

There are 13 food-based standards for school lunches. For more details on each of the food-based standards please refer to the Children's Food Trust publication '*Food-based standards for school lunches and food other than lunch: a quick guide for headteachers and governors*'.

Schools must provide:

1. Fruit and vegetables: Not less than two portions of fruit and vegetables/salad per day per pupil must be provided; at least one must be vegetables/salad and at least one must be fruit
2. Oily fish: Oily fish such as salmon or mackerel must be provided at least once every three weeks
3. Bread with no added fat or oil: Bread with no added fat or oil must be provided on a daily basis. Note: Bread does not have to be free, and the amount that must be provided is not specified in the Regulations
4. Drinking water: Free fresh drinking water must be provided at all times
5. Healthier drinks: Schools must provide only permitted drinks

Schools must ensure that:

6. Salt: Salt is not available to add to food after the cooking process is complete, and is not provided at tables or service counters.
7. Condiments: Condiments such as ketchup and mayonnaise are only available in sachets or individual portions of not more than 10g or 1 teaspoonful.
8. Snacks: No snacks shall be provided other than nuts, seeds, fruit or vegetables without added fat, salt, sugar or honey. Savoury crackers and breadsticks can only be served with fruit, vegetables or dairy food as part of school lunch.
9. Meat products: A meat product (manufactured or homemade) from each of four groups may not be provided more than once per fortnight across the school day:
 - Group 1: Burger, hamburger, chopped meat, corned meat.

- Group 2: Sausage, sausage meat, link, chipolata, and luncheon meat.
- Group 3: Individual meat pie, meat pudding, Melton Mowbray pie, game pie, Scottish (or Scotch) pie, pasty or pastie, bridie, sausage roll.
- Group 4: Any other shaped or coated product e.g. nuggets, meatballs.

10. Starchy food cooked in fat or oil (e.g. roast potatoes, chips, fried rice) must not be provided on more than 3 days a week, across the school day.

11. Deep-fried food: No more than 2 deep-fried food items (including items deep-fried in the kitchen or flash-fried during manufacture) should be provided in a single week across the school day.

12. Cakes and biscuits: Cakes and biscuits can be provided at lunchtime but must not contain any confectionery.

13. Confectionery: Confectionery must not be provided at any time of the school day.

Nutrient-based standards for school lunches

The nutrient-based standards for school lunches aim to make the food offered at lunchtime healthier by increasing the vitamin and mineral content, and decreasing the fat, saturated fat, non-milk extrinsic (NME) sugar and sodium (salt) content.

There are 14 nutrient-based standards for school lunches. For more details on each of the nutrient-based standards, please refer to the Children's Food Trust publication [Nutrient-based standards for school lunches](#).

The nutrient-based standards apply to an average school lunch within a one to four week menu cycle, and relate to overall planned provision of food and drink, rather than individual consumption. The average school lunch can be calculated for a school or a group of schools and must be calculated by totalling the amounts of energy and nutrients provided by all school lunches in a menu cycle and then dividing that total estimated number of school lunches served to individual pupils during that menu cycle.

To calculate an average school lunch in practice the details of all food and drink items (except the extra bread) provided in the menu cycle should be entered into the menu planning and nutrient analysis software, together with the portion sizes and the estimated number of each menu item. This will include recipes for food prepared from scratch and any product specifications for brought in items. Remember to include all menu items including drinks provided in all school food outlets at lunchtime.

Bread provided as part of a meal must not be included in the nutrient analysis. The extra bread (without added fat or oil), available on an unrestricted basis to meet the needs of children with greater energy requirements must not be included in the nutrient analysis.

The rationale for bread to be available as an extra is to encourage pupils to fill up on carbohydrate rather than high fat, high sugar foods.

School lunch is defined as all food and drink provided for consumption by pupils as their midday meal. If some of the food and drink provided at mid-morning break is considered to be part of the lunchtime provision it should be included when calculating an average school lunch.

An average school lunch must provide:

- The amount of energy specified in the table below (with 5 per cent tolerance shown in brackets). The standard for energy is based on an average value, rather than a minimum or a maximum, as pupils are all developing and growing at differing rates and have different levels of activity.
- No more than the maximum amount stated for fat, saturated fat, non-milk extrinsic sugars (NME) sugars and sodium, as too much can be harmful.
- At least the minimum amount stated for carbohydrate, protein, fibre, vitamin A, vitamin C, folate, calcium, iron and zinc as too little can be harmful.
- Where a maintained special school or a pupil referral unit provides both primary and secondary education, a school lunch provided to a junior pupil must comply with the requirements for primary schools as outlined in the table below; and a school lunch provided to a senior pupil must comply with the requirements for secondary schools as outlined in the table below.

Nutrient-based standards by age, sex and type of school							
Energy or nutrient and amount of measurement	Minimum or maximum value?	Primary schools	Middle schools		Secondary schools		
			Aged 7-10	Aged 11-14	Single sex girls	Single sex boys	Co-ed
		School years R, 1-6	School years 3,4,5,6	School years 7,8,9,10	School years 7-12	School years 7-12	School years 7-12
Energy in kilojoules (kilocalories)	± 5%	2215 (530)	2328 (557)	2549 (610)	2412 (577)	2985 (714)	2700 (646)
Fat (grams)	Max	20.6	21.6	23.7	22.5	27.8	25.1
Saturated fat (grams)	Max	6.5	6.8	7.5	7.1	8.7	7.9
Non-milk extrinsic sugars (grams)	Max	15.5	16.3	17.9	16.9	20.9	18.9
Sodium (milligrams)	Max	499	595	714	714	714	714
Carbohydrate (grams)	Min	70.6	74.2	81.3	77.0	95.2	86.1
Fibre (grams)	Min	4.2	4.5	4.9	4.6	5.7	5.2
Protein (grams)	Min	7.5	8.5	12.5	12.7	13.8	13.3
Iron (milligrams)	Min	3.0	3.0	5.2	5.2	4.0	5.2
Zinc (milligrams)	Min	2.5	2.5	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.3
Calcium (milligrams)	Min	193	193	350	280	350	350
Vitamin A (micrograms)	Min	175	175	210	210	245	245
Vitamin C (grams)	Min	10.5	10.5	12.3	14.0	14.0	14.0
Folate (micrograms)	Min	53	53	70	70	70	70

Food-based standards for school food other than lunch

These regulations set out the requirements for school food provided across the school day at times other than lunch to registered pupils at a local authority maintained primary, secondary, special school or pupil referral unit, whether on the school premises or not, and to any other person on the school premises.

School food other than lunch includes breakfast clubs, tuck shops, mid-morning break, vending and after school clubs.

There are 11 food-based standards for food other than lunch. For more details on each of the food-based standards, please refer to the [Food-based standards for school lunches and food other than lunch](#).

Schools must provide:

- fruit and vegetables at all school food outlets.
- fresh drinking water at all times.
- healthier drinks: schools must provide only permitted drinks

Schools must ensure that:

- meat products (manufactured or homemade) from each of four groups are not provided more than once per fortnight across the school day:
- no snacks are provided other than nuts, seeds, fruit or vegetables without added fat, salt, sugar or honey
- condiments such as ketchup and mayonnaise are only available in sachets or individual portions of not more than 10g or 1 teaspoonful
- salt is not available to add to food after the cooking process is complete, and is not provided at tables or service counters o group 1: burger, hamburger, chopped meat, corned meat
 - group 2: sausage, sausage meat, link, chipolata, and luncheon meat.
 - group 3: individual meat pie, meat pudding, Melton Mowbray pie, game pie, Scottish (or Scotch) pie, pasty or pastie, bridie, sausage roll
 - group 4: any other shaped or coated product eg nuggets, meatballs
- starchy food cooked in fat or oil (e.g. roast potatoes, chips, fried rice) is not provided on more than 3 days a week across the school day
- no more than 2 deep-fried food items (including items deep-fried in the kitchen or flash-fried during manufacture) are provided in a single week across the school day
- cakes and biscuits are only provided as part of a school lunch.
- confectionery is not provided at any time of the school day

Exemptions to the school food regulations

The School Food Regulations do not apply to food provided:

- a. at parties or celebrations to mark religious or cultural occasions
- b. at occasional fund-raising events
- c. as rewards for achievement, good behaviour or effort
- d. for use in teaching food preparation and cookery skills, provided that any food prepared is not served to pupils as part of a school lunch
- e. on an occasional basis by parents or pupils
- f. by maintained boarding schools who are allowed to provide cakes, biscuits, confectionery and snacks as part of an evening meal before 6 pm.

Academies established between September 2008 and September 2010 are required to adhere to the standards through a clause in their funding agreements, as do academies and free schools entering into a funding agreement from June 2014.. Academies and free schools set up between these dates are encouraged to use the national school food standards as a guide to promote healthy eating and good nutrition in their school.



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