

**Colaiste Muire**  
**Tuar Mhic Eadaigh**  
**Co Maigh Eo**  
**Healthy Eating Policy**

## **Introduction**

Food and drink are an essential part of our daily lives. They play a fundamental role in the development of the human being. Making the right choices to support our nutrition requirements satisfies our physiological needs, and also contributes to our mental and emotional development. What we eat and drink is directly related to our state of health. Young people need to be aware of the importance of good nutrition for health in order to optimise their growth, health and developmental potential through their teenage years and beyond. By developing a Healthy Eating Policy that reflects and represents the whole-school community, Colaiste Muire hopes to contribute to this.

Whilst Healthy Eating has always been strongly encouraged in Colaiste Muire it has been decided to draw up a Healthy Eating Policy. This policy was formulated by the Healthy Eating Policy Committee in consultation with management, teaching staff, parents and pupils. The policy is applicable to all pupils when on the school grounds.

## **Rationale**

Why is it necessary to devise a policy?

For young people to achieve their full potential, it is essential that they eat healthily as healthy eating provides the building blocks for lifelong health and well-being. Adolescence is a time of physical growth and development – the most rapid since infancy. It requires adequate intake of energy and nutrients. Eating a nourishing breakfast and a healthy school lunch allows children to take full advantage of the education provided for them.

The Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC, 2016) report has shown that many

adolescents have poor eating habits. Skipping breakfast and/or lunch is a habit reported by up to 17% of students, while many do not eat good food or drink enough fluid. All this can lessen their concentration levels and make learning more difficult. Research has also shown that the foods eaten at lunchtime can affect behaviour in the classroom during the afternoon: consuming food and drink that are high in fats and sugars, especially fizzy drinks, may cause over-activity, resulting in difficult classroom management.

Obesity – The Policy Challenges: The Report of the National Task Force on Obesity (2015)

highlighted the worrying increase in childhood obesity across Europe. Figures suggest that the number of overweight children in Ireland has trebled over the past decade and may be rising at a rate of 10,000 per year. A further study “Growing up in Ireland”(2021) showed that almost 20% of nine year-olds were overweight and a further 7% obese. Foods associated with this increase in obesity include energy-dense, micronutrient-poor foods such as packaged sweet and savoury snacks and sugar-sweetened soft drinks.

The NTFO report makes recommendations for the education sector.

Two key recommendations provide a strong basis for action by schools:

- Nutrition and physical activity levels of school children should be seen as part of the duty of care of each school, for example in relation to catering for school meals, policy on vending machines, and provision of fresh drinking water.

- All post-primary schools should be encouraged to engage with their student councils and parents’ associations in promoting the concept of ‘healthy eating and active living’.

Young people spend a large part of the day in school where they eat at least one of their main meals. The home plays the major role in determining healthy eating habits. However, the school, in partnership with parents, can make an important contribution. It is recommended that a whole school approach be taken in developing a Healthy Eating Policy. This creates a strong sense of ownership among students, staff and parents and a commitment to sustain the improvements.

## **Implementation**

In developing this Healthy Eating Policy, the school will address two key action areas:

(a) the whole-school context

(b) teaching and learning. This ensures that an action plan to develop a

supportive whole-school environment is created and that consistent messages are provided through the curriculum.

## **Aims of Policy**

- To encourage the nutritional and overall well-being of all pupils in the school
- To heighten an awareness of the importance of a balanced diet
- To encourage pupils to make wise choices about food and nutrition
- To recognise the dietary needs of all pupils and aim to ensure that all pupils' individual and cultural needs are met
- To support pupils to develop life-long healthy eating practises and a positive approach towards food
- To raise levels of concentration within class due to consumption of healthy food
- To monitor and review the schools practise and policy and, if necessary, make amendments.

## **Action Plan**

### **a) Whole-school context**

Colaiste Muire provides a physical and social environment that encourages healthy eating. It ensures that lessons learnt in the classroom are transferred into school life and that healthy-eating messages are consistent throughout the school.

In order to implement a Healthy Eating Policy consideration must be given to the following:

- Promote and market healthy eating:
  - Opportunities for unhealthy eating choices within the school environment have been removed.
  - ie. Removal of fast food, sweets and fizzy drinks as a saleable item on the premises.
  - Replacement of the above with a healthier option e.g. water, fruit juices, isotonic drinks, milk.
  - Fizzy drinks and high-caffeine drinks are not permitted within the school grounds.
  - Make provision for healthy lunches which could be served under the constraints of a small canteen area.
  - Survey students to ascertain their preferences regarding food choices.
  - Consult with parents through the parents' association.

- Healthy Eating Events:

Hosting a Healthy Eating Day/Week offers an ideal opportunity to provide a variety of healthy eating activities for students, staff and parents. Healthy Eating Week activities may include:

- inviting guest speakers into the classroom
- offering healthy options in the canteen at reduced prices
- hosting a healthy-eating cookery demonstrations/competition
- holding art/slogan competitions; The activities deemed to be the most beneficial may be repeated at appropriate times throughout the school year and integrated into school life.
- Involving a group of students and offering them specific roles in promoting and marketing healthy eating helps to influence the wider student body.
- Support and advise parents: To encourage parents to play a role, it is important to offer them support. This may take many forms (e.g. being kept informed via newsletter/flyer, information home on healthy eating and the nutrition needs of a young person).
- Involve the wider community: This helps to provide support and expertise to the school and may help to generate heightened interest in healthy eating locally.

**Possible ways of involving the wider community are:**

- developing initiatives in partnership with local food businesses –e.g. shops.
- participating in national youth projects – for example, Young Social Innovators or school business projects.
- the local media can also play a part by highlighting the school’s good work

**b) Teaching and learning**

The classroom should be used to inform the whole-school practice and help instigate change.

Health education is not only about delivering information but also about developing the skills and confidence required to make healthy choices.

**Subject areas**

The subject of healthy eating is addressed to varying degrees in many subject areas that offer a unique opportunity for teachers to influence young people in this regard. Home Economics, Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE), Science, and Physical Education (PE) are subjects on the curriculum that address aspects of diet, nutrition, physical activity and health.

**Cross-curricular projects**

These provide valuable learning opportunities. Examples of cross-curricular links include:

English (Media Studies) and Art. Pastoral-care may also offer teaching and learning opportunities.

## Success Criteria

The success of this initiative will be measured in terms of how the pupils participate and are enthusiastic about the project.

- That all families are more aware of and improve their food choices.
- That teachers continue to note the knock-on effects in terms of good learning.
- That by taking a cross curricular approach to this initiative, there are benefits to promoting healthy food for healthy minds.

## Roles and Responsibility

- The policy is promoted by the teaching staff in the school in their classroom work. Specific guidelines are presented to pupils at and to parents at the during healthy eating week to encourage a healthy lunch-box/healthy eating.
- Feedback will be presented to the principal at staff meetings and at parent association meetings in terms of the implementation and success.
- All special dietary requirements will be respected inclusive of dietary needs and cultural dietary habits. These requirements must be communicated to the Principal/Deputy Principal as soon as possible.
- Canteen personnel will ensure that healthy options are available to students each lunchtime and are consumed in the appropriate area.
- Canteen personnel will ensure that healthy snacks are available to students each lunchtime.
- Hot drinks and bottles of water may be purchased on school premises.
- Staff have the right to confiscate fizzy drinks and high-caffeine drinks or any other foods deemed inappropriate, from students on school grounds.
- Teachers will regularly inform pupils of the importance of healthy eating and healthy lunches.
- The initiative will be monitored by the Principal having considered feedback from staff and parents on its continuation and on how the initiative can be further enhanced and improved.

## Timeframe for Implementation

The policy will be fully implemented immediately following discussion with The Parents' Association and the Board of Management.

## Timeframe for Review

The policy will be reviewed on an annual basis in consultation with the whole school community. The review will consider any legislative changes, new policy and strategy documents, changes in school facilities and feedback from parents, students and staff.

## Responsibility for Review

- Staff; feedback on their classroom success or otherwise. This will be discussed at a staff meeting.
- Pupils will be asked to contribute to the review by offering suggestions on other healthy snacks/meals that could be included in the school shop.
- Parents; The Parent Association will be asked to comment on the policy and its implementation.
- The review will be co-ordinated by the Healthy Eating Policy Committee.
- The Board of Management will discuss the policy and any recommendations will be included in the review.

## Ratification and Communication

This policy was ratified by The Board of Management of Colaiste Muire on;

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson of Board of Management

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal