



SCHOOL DINNERS 2.0

The UK's biggest and most important restaurant chain — the school food system — shapes what millions of children eat every day. Come September 2026, with universal breakfast clubs and wider access to free school meals, there will be even more covers to serve — during term time, around two-thirds of a child's meals are provided at school¹. That is a phenomenal opportunity to *directly* improve children's diets at scale.

When school food is done well, children are healthier and happier^{2,3}. They have more energy, better wellbeing, fewer days off sick^{4,5,6}, and they learn better too — with improved focus, behaviour and attainment^{7,8}. And it isn't just about what's on the plate, the shared meal experience matters too. When children eat the same food together, their confidence grows and anxiety falls^{9,10}. Nutrition is not separate from learning, it underpins it.

Families benefit as well. Affordable, high-quality school meals ease pressure on household budgets, reduce stress at home and help families provide consistent, nutritious food — particularly as living costs rise^{11,12}.

These benefits build over time. Healthier children become healthier adults. Stronger educational outcomes lead to higher productivity and lower long-term costs to the NHS and social care. Investing in school food pays dividends — for children, for families and for the country¹³.

So let's get cracking, with amazing and enforced school food standards.

ALL THE LOVELY DETAILS

Breakfast clubs

- Only low sugar cereals (5g/100g) that are either a source of or high in fibre, unflavoured porridge and no added sugar muesli available
- Fortified cereal options should also be available (iron, vitamin D etc.)
- Meet with Public Health England's salt reduction target and contain no more than 0.48-0.90g salt per 100g
- Wholemeal, 50:50 and seeded bread or bagel options or fruit based buns and crumpets with responsibly portioned spreads e.g. reduced sugar jam
- Serve dairy milk or a fortified and unsweetened plant based dairy alternative (calcium, B12, B2, iodine) and a portion of fruit or vegetables
- Pastries, croissants and cured or processed meats should not be permitted

¹ Assumptions - term time: 190 days.

Child eats 3 meals per day

School provides 2 meals per day (breakfast + lunch)

2 meals x 190 days = 380 meals / 380 + 570 = 66.7%

² <https://urbanhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/loUH-Free-School-Meals-Report.pdf>

³ <https://urbanhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/loUH-Free-School-Meals-Report.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S02727519307605>

⁵ [https://www.jandonline.org/article/S0002-8223\(05\)00151-3/fulltext](https://www.jandonline.org/article/S0002-8223(05)00151-3/fulltext)

⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0167629611000270>

⁷ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0002831223122266>

⁸ Brown, V et al. (2012). Evaluation of the Free School Meals Pilot: Impact Report. London: DFE (DFE-RR227)

⁹ [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(12\)00317-5/fulltext](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(12)00317-5/fulltext)

¹⁰ <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article-abstract/127/6/e1565/30112/Is-Frequency-of-Shared-Family-Meals-Related-to-the?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

¹¹ <https://urbanhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/loUH-Free-School-Meals-Report.pdf>

¹² <https://urbanhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/loUH-Free-School-Meals-Report.pdf>

¹³ <https://urbanhealth.org.uk/insights/reports/expanding-free-school-meals-a-cost-benefit-analysis>

Foods high in fat, salt and sugar

- No more than one portion of food every other week from these options:
 - Breadcrumb-coated
 - Pastry coated (with the exception of filo pastry)
 - Pizza
 - Processed meat products (cured meats, sausages etc.)
- No deep fried or battered options.
- No sweets, cakes/desserts, crisps, cereal bars, biscuits, chocolate or chocolate-coated products
- Salt not to be added to food after it has been cooked
- Condiments limited to 10g portions and must be reduced salt and sugar versions (without artificial ingredients, including sweeteners, or flavour enhancers)

School aged children consume 2.5 times more free sugar compared to recommendations, and exceed daily recommendations for saturated fat

Starchy Foods

- All pasta, rice and bread to be wholemeal, 50:50 or fibre fortified white varieties
- Starchy food cooked in or with fat or oil, must not be deep fried, including oven cooked chips once every other week as part of a meal
- Bread must contain 6g fibre per 100g and must be wholemeal. Available for breakfast clubs.
- A portion from this food group every day with a variety of three each week.

86% of children and 96% of teenagers do not eat enough fibre

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non dairy sources of protein

- Fish served at least once a week, alternating between white fish and oily fish each week
- Meat, poultry and pulses as the main source of protein at least three times each week, including a meat free day where pulses are offered within or as the source of protein
- Vegetarian options must offer pulses as the main source of protein and limit ultra processed meat alternative products where possible
- Cured and processed meats (e.g. sausages and bacon) should be limited to once a week, lower salt options should be selected
- A portion from this food group every day

On average, children eat 20g of oily fish a week; an 85% deficit

Fruit and Vegetables

- Minimum 2 portions of vegetables or legumes at main meal
- Salad available to be added to a meal as a side
- A variety of at least 4 different vegetables and 4 different fruits should be made available each week
- Only available dessert option in primary and secondary schools to be a portion of fruit and



optional dairy yoghurt or plant based yoghurt

Dairy & Alternatives

- Dairy milk and a plant based unsweetened and fortified (calcium, B2, B12, iodine) alternative
- 1 portion of food from this group daily
- Dairy yoghurt and fortified plant based yoghurts available as a dessert along with mandatory fruit and to contain no added sugars or artificial sweeteners

Snacks

- Primary: Fruit , Yoghurt* ,
- Secondary : Hummus / Low fat cream cheese and Vegetable batons, and other lower sugar snacks e.g. Popcorn*

Drinks

- Water and dairy milk or plant based unsweetened and fortified (calcium, B2, B12, iodine) alternative.
- No carbonated soft drinks permitted, including fruit juices with sparkling water.
- No added sugar or artificial non-sugar sweetened beverages (secondary schools only)
- Secondary schools should mirror standards for primary schools

Free sugar intake in children and teenagers is more than double maximum recommendations, with soft drinks being a major contributor.