Whole School Food Policy Template - Special Schools

Using this template: This template is designed to help specialist schools supporting children and young people with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) to create a clear, concise and practical whole school food policy. Adapt the wording so it reflects your school context, community, catering arrangement and existing policies. Keep the final policy focused and proportionate; aim for 10 pages or fewer, with detailed guidance, examples and supporting resources moved to appendices or linked documents. Purple text highlights prompts or optional wording that should be completed, adapted or removed before the policy is approved.

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1. Policy Information

Policy Lead	[Insert Name]
Governor Lead	[Insert Name]
Date Approved	[Insert Date]
Review Date	[Insert Date]
Version	[Insert Version]

2. Introduction

At [School Name], we recognise that food plays an important role in supporting pupils health, wellbeing, communication, learning and independence. Through a whole-school approach to food, we create positive, inclusive and nourishing food experiences that support pupils at every stage of their food journey.

By working in partnership with students, families, staff and catering providers, we foster a positive and inclusive food culture that reflects our school community and supports a balanced relationship with food.

3. Food Policy Champions

This policy was developed collaboratively by: [Insert names/titles of staff, governors, caterers, students, and any partners]. We have a [student council/food champions group] that contributes to ongoing review and planning of food activities across the school.

4. Aims & Objectives

Our Aims is to ensure all children are well nourished, supported, and empowered to enjoy food in a safe and inclusive setting, with provision that meets national standards and reflects our school values.

Our objectives include:

- Provide a variety of nutritious, appealing meals that meet the School Food Standards.
- Respect children's medical, sensory, and cultural food needs.
- Holding a calm, supportive dining environment that promotes independence and positive food experiences.
- Support children's individual food journeys, working with families and professionals as needed.
- Use visuals and routines to help children make choices and communicate at mealtimes.
- Offer regular opportunities for cooking, tasting, and food exploration across the curriculum.
- Listen to children's voice in shaping food provision and mealtime experiences.

Please add any other aims/objectives that you feel are suitable.

[Add to/remove as appropriate, e.g.]

Our school commitments are:

- Providing food and drink that meets School Food Standards and supports pupil health and wellbeing.
- Creating a welcoming, inclusive and non-judgemental food culture.
- Respecting pupil autonomy and individual differences around eating.
- Supporting safe and enjoyable mealtimes for all.
- Working collaboratively with families and professionals.
- Celebrating progress and participation rather than focusing solely on food intake.
- Continuously reviewing food provision and dining experiences.

Staff are expected to:

- Model positive and inclusive attitudes towards food and drink.
- Use respectful, neutral and inclusive food language.
- Support pupils during mealtimes in a calm and encouraging manner.
- Follow all feeding plans and medical guidance.
- Promote communication and choice making.
- Respect pupils' sensory preferences and individual needs.
- Encourage independence wherever appropriate.

We ask parents and carers to:

- Share information regarding dietary, medical, cultural or sensory needs.
- Work in partnership with the school to support their child's food journey.
- Follow guidance regarding packed lunches, celebrations and allergies.
- Inform the school of any changes to medical or feeding requirements.

We support students to:

- Express preferences and make choices.
- Explore food at their own pace.
- Develop communication skills around food and mealtimes.
- Contribute feedback about meals and dining experiences.
- Respect the needs and choices of others.

5. Food Culture, Role Modelling & Positive Relationship with Food

Food culture is shaped by the messages pupils receive about food from the adults around them. We recognise the important role school staff play in creating positive food experiences.

Staff Role Modelling

Staff act as positive role models by demonstrating enjoyment of a variety of foods and creating welcoming social mealtimes. Where appropriate, staff sit alongside pupils and support interaction, communication and independence.

Staff are also mindful of the messages they give through conversations about food, body image and eating behaviours.

Language Around Food

We use neutral and respectful language that promotes food confidence and emotional wellbeing.

We avoid language that labels foods as:

- "Good" or "bad"
- "Healthy" or "unhealthy"
- "Naughty" foods
- "Treat" foods

Instead, we talk about food in terms of:

- Nourishment
- Enjoyment
- Energy
- Growth
- Learning
- Individual preferences

Pupils are encouraged to explore food without pressure and to develop trust in their own experiences of eating.

Food as a Reward

We recognise that some pupils may have highly individual motivators and reinforcement strategies. Where food forms part of a personalised support plan, this is considered carefully alongside educational, behavioural and therapeutic goals.

Across the school, we aim to reduce reliance on food-based rewards and increase the use of non-food motivators such as:

- Praise

- Sensory activities
- Music
- Movement breaks
- Preferred interests
- Additional play opportunities
- Leadership responsibilities
- Certificates and recognition

Supporting Positive Food Journeys

We understand that many pupils may experience challenges with food acceptance, sensory processing, oral motor skills or anxiety around eating.

Progress is celebrated at every stage and may include:

- Tolerating food nearby
- Touching food
- Smelling food
- Exploring food through play
- Preparing food
- Tasting food
- Expanding accepted foods

Pupils are never forced to eat and are supported to engage with food in ways that are appropriate to their needs.

6. Food Provision & Dining Environment

School Food Standards (SFS) Compliance: We ensure our menus comply with the SFS across food served across the whole school day, including clubs if applicable. A member of SLT [insert name/title] and a school governor [insert name] are responsible for ensuring ongoing compliance.

○ Breakfast Club [remove if not applicable]

We offer a breakfast club which serves a range of nutritious food (including wholemeal carbohydrates, fruits and protein-based foods) to support students' health, wellbeing, concentration and energy for learning, play and social interaction throughout the school day.

- Insert more information incl. link to webpage, suggestions below:
- Who is responsible for running your breakfast club? In house or external?
- How do you ensure the food served complies with the school food standards?
- If you have consulted with parents, students, worked with an organisation or used any resources that helped in the initial consultation, you could mention how students/parents, individuals or organisation have contributed/consulted towards menu/club changes.

Lunchtime Offer

Lunch is provided by [Insert Catering Provider].

Provision may include:

- Texture modified meals.
- Dysphagia-friendly options.
- Vegetarian and vegan choices.
- Allergy-aware preparation.
- Medical diet adaptations.
- Alternative options where clinically required.

The school works closely with Speech and Language Therapists, Dietitians, Occupational Therapists and healthcare professionals to ensure food provision is safe and appropriate.

Insert more information incl. link to menu, suggestions below:

- What is the dessert offer? Is fruit and yogurt available daily?
- How is the menu monitored?
- Does the food reflect the religious and cultural needs of the school community, and how do you ensure this?

After School Club [remove if not applicable]

Insert more information incl. link to webpage, suggestions below:

- Who runs your afterschool club? [in house or external]
- Do you offer a meal or a snack?
- Do you allow parents to send in their own snack or allow students to eat from their packed lunch within afterschool club? If so, what is allowed/not allowed?
- How do you ensure the food served complies with the school food standards?
- Have students/parents been consulted regarding the menu?

Water Only School [if not applicable, edit to how you promote water consumption]

Insert more information, suggestions below:

- Why has your school chosen to be water only? Is this a policy set by the local authority?
- Does the water only policy apply across the whole school day?
- Does the water only policy apply packed lunches?
- How are the school promoting water consumption? E.g. water fountains, jugs on tables, easy access to free water throughout the day etc.

- Does this apply to the staff in the school? Are they positive role models encouraging students to drink water?
- If required for a medical condition, how will the school ensure the needs of these students are met? E.g. diabetic students.

7. Dining Environment

We recognise that the dining environment is equally as important as the food itself.

For many pupils, the sensory, social and communication demands of mealtimes can be significant. We therefore strive to create dining experiences that support regulation, engagement and wellbeing.

Mealtime Spaces

Pupils may eat in a variety of settings including (delete or add in options):

- Main dining halls
- Classrooms
- Small group dining areas
- Quiet dining spaces
- Specialist feeding environments

Arrangements are made according to individual needs rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Sensory-Friendly Dining

We aim to reduce barriers to successful eating by considering (delete or add in options):

- Noise levels
- Lighting
- Visual clutter
- Seating arrangements
- Crowd density
- Predictability and routine

Strategies may include:

- Smaller dining groups
- Ear defenders where appropriate
- Alternative seating

- Staggered lunch sittings
- Defined eating spaces
- Calm transitions to mealtimes

Communication Support

Communication is embedded throughout mealtimes.

Support may include:

- Visual menus
- Choice boards
- Symbol-supported communication
- AAC devices
- Photographs
- Social stories
- Now-and-next boards

Pupils are encouraged to communicate preferences, requests and choices in ways that are meaningful to them.

Promoting Independence

Pupils are supported to develop independence through opportunities to:

- Make choices
- Serve food
- Pour drinks
- Clear tables
- Use adaptive equipment
- Build self-feeding skills

Independence is developed at an individual pace and celebrated accordingly.

Specialist Feeding Support

Where required, pupils have personalised feeding plans informed by relevant professionals.

Staff receive appropriate training and support relating to:

- Dysphagia

- Safe feeding practices
- Texture modification
- Tube feeding awareness
- Allergies
- Emergency procedures

Plans are reviewed regularly in partnership with families and healthcare teams.

8. Food Brought In

Food brought in covers many different times within the school food environment and covers anything brought in by students, as well as provided by parents or staff. We strive to ensure that food brought into the school complies with school food standards (Appendix 1).

Packed Lunches

We promote variety and balance in packed lunches, with an emphasis on including fruit, vegetables, wholemeal carbohydrates and protein rich foods, while avoiding items high in salt, sugar or saturated fats. Packed lunches include those brought from home as well as those provided by the school or by families for trips.

However, we recognise that some pupils may have highly restricted diets due to sensory, developmental or medical reasons.

In these cases:

- Individual needs will be respected.
- Families will be supported without judgement.
- Advice from health professionals will be considered.
- Small achievable steps may be encouraged where appropriate.

Our priority is maintaining a positive relationship with food whilst supporting nutritional needs.

Celebrations & Events

Celebrations in school reflect our food ethos and are inclusive of all students. This applies to the following occasions: [Add to/remove as appropriate, e.g.] Breaktimes, Parents evenings, Sports days/events, School council meetings, Exam or test days/weeks, End of term, School trips and Birthdays.

All students should feel equally celebrated on their birthdays and special occasions. For this reason, we kindly ask that families do not bring in cakes or sweets to share in class. While well-intentioned, this can create inequity, as not all families are able to contribute in the same way and also raises

concerns around allergies and dietary restrictions. Instead, we encourage other meaningful and inclusive ways to celebrate, such as:

- Extra playtime or a special activity chosen by the birthday child
- Wearing a birthday badge, hat or sash for the day
- A classroom cheer or birthday song
- Having their photo featured on a birthday display board
- Choosing a story to be read to the class
- Leading a class game or being the helper for the day
- Receiving a birthday certificate or card from the class or teacher
- A non-food treat from the school (e.g. sticker, pencil, bookmark).

We also strive to ensure that nutritious food and drink options are available at the following school events and celebrations: [Add to/remove as appropriate, e.g.] Fundraising events, Seasonal celebrations (Christmas, Easter, Eid etc.), Summer and winter fair, international events/Cultural week, Charity weeks: E.g., Macmillan coffee morning.

We actively promote non-food celebrations, including:

- Singing and music
- Special activities
- Birthday badges
- Certificates
- Recognition assemblies
- Additional play opportunities

9. Food Education

Food education is embedded across the curriculum and adapted to meet the needs of our pupils.

Activities may include:

- Cooking
- Baking
- Food tasting
- Sensory food exploration
- Food growing
- Shopping activities
- Independent living skills
- Life skills programmes
- Gardening projects
- Healthy Eating Week
- Cultural food celebrations

Food education focuses on participation, exploration, and enjoyment rather than performance or outcomes.

Staff Training and Support: Staff are supported through training and professional development to deliver inclusive, age-appropriate food education and to promote positive relationships with food.

10. Equity, Inclusion & Sustainability

We recognise the importance of all students, staff and visitors having equal access to inclusive food-related activities and opportunities. We aim to create an inclusive environment where everyone feels welcome, respected and able to meet their nutritional, cultural, religious and dietary needs.

[Add to/remove as appropriate, e.g.]

- We identify and respond appropriately to concerns about a student's nutrition, wellbeing or access to food.
- We work to reduce barriers to accessing food and support available to pupils and families, ensuring this is provided sensitively and without stigma.
- We ensure our food provision reflects the cultural, religious, medical and dietary needs of our school community.
- We support students and staff who are fasting, helping them to participate fully in school life while respecting their beliefs and practices.
- We ensure that food-related activities, celebrations and events are inclusive and do not create unnecessary cultural, financial or practical barriers to participation.
- We ensure relevant staff understand the signs of disordered eating and know how to respond, safeguard and signpost students and families to appropriate support.

Free School Meals (FSM) Uptake: We encourage eligible families to take up free school meals, as it provides a balanced, nourishing lunch that supports students' health, learning and wellbeing. In England, free school meals are now available to all children from households in receipt of Universal Credit. In London, this is also available to all primary school children [remove if not applicable].

- Do you offer any support to parents/students applying for free school meals?
- Some local authorities extend this funding to provide wider eligibility for accessing a free school meal, if this is available to your school mention it here.
- You may also have your own information on subsidies/support for families in certain circumstances or those with no recourse to public funds, it is also worth considering your non-payment policy in this section.

Food Waste: We educate students about food waste and implement practices such as:

- Encouraging appropriate portion sizes
- Monitoring and reducing food waste through regular review of leftovers and waste levels
- Supporting food redistribution, composting or food growing initiatives where possible.

Planet Health: We promote environmentally conscious food habits through activities such as:

- Meat-free or plant-based menu days
- Sourcing seasonal, locally produced ingredients where possible
- Linking food, climate and sustainability topics across the curriculum, assemblies and enrichment activities.
- Promoting reusable water bottles, lunch containers and reduced single-use packaging.

Allergies and Special diets: All food activities and services are inclusive of students with allergies, sensory, medical or learning needs. Please see our separate allergy policy for more information [add link to school allergy policy].

11. Monitoring & Evaluation

We will monitor and review this policy regularly to ensure it is implemented consistently and continues to support a positive, inclusive and nourishing food culture across the school. [Add to/remove as appropriate, e.g.]

- The policy lead, governor lead and catering provider will review the school food environment at least termly, including food provision, dining experiences, food brought into school, celebrations, clubs and food education activities.
- Feedback will be gathered continuously through student voice activities, school council or food ambassador meetings, parent/carer surveys, staff feedback, catering meetings and informal comments shared with the school office or relevant staff.
- The school will monitor compliance with the school food standards [termly].
- Participation and accessibility will be reviewed [termly], including school meal uptake, FSM uptake, packed lunch patterns and the support available to families.
- This policy will be reviewed [annually], with input from students, staff, families, governors, catering providers and other relevant stakeholders.